

**Title: Ku Village in Transformation  
- A Case Study of Village Politics in Post-Mao China.**

**Present to  
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**by**

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**To My Parents  
& Edith**



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## Abstract

This thesis is based on my own research experience in studying the transformation of rural China in a natural village of South China. Drawing on J.C. Oi's framework of "Socialist Clientelism", I intend to explain and explore the impact of rural reform in the late 1970s on the power relationship between the village cadres and the peasants.

The findings in Ku Village show the evidence that the patron-client bond between the village cadres and the peasants has broken down. The powerlessness of village organs, an atomistic rural community, and the autonomous peasant households are the striking features in Ku Village. Now the village cadres are powerless to implement the state policy and mobilize the peasants. The peasants are autonomous in production and independent of the village cadres. To explain the erosion of socialist patron-client bond, apart from the similar factors shared with other villages (such as the reconstruction of local administrative organization, responsibility system and division of land), the transformation of local economy plays an even more important role in the erosion of socialist patron-client bond. The development of Shatian shaddock plantation totally eliminates the remaining control mechanism of the village cadres over the peasants. It also enhances the economic power of peasants and makes the peasants more independent of the government.



In this research, I also attempt to bring the peasants back into political analysis and re-emphasize the peasants power. The framework of clientelism is inadequate to analyze the everyday practice of power. To understand the daily dynamic of power, I draw on James Scott's concept of "everyday forms of resistance" to analyze the struggle between the peasants and those who intend to extract interest from them. The findings in Ku Village suggest to me that peasants are not powerless and impotent. They always employ the everyday forms of resistance to fight for their own interest whether in Maoist China or post-Mao China. To the peasants, the everyday form of resistance is the most significant method to check the unfair state policy and minimize their disadvantage. They are far less interested in changing the larger structure of existing state. So the absence of formal organizations, of open and large-scale collective actions in rural China do not imply that the peasants are powerless as Marxists claimed; on the contrary, it is because none of formal organizations and open collective actions are required.



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## Chapter One

### Introduction -- Bringing the Peasants Back In

*Peasants do not write their own history nor is it written for them. It is written about and, often, without them. Their voice is barely ever heard at those places where decisions are made about policies and profits. It is the interests and images of non-peasants which define the ways the "Peasant Question" is being put and resolved in economic and political planning by state and agribusiness, impinging deeply on the peasants' existence in the modern world.*

--- Shanin, T. 1987

#### I. Sister Ling's Story

The quarrel attracted the attention of the people in the fair of Songkou town. More and more people went to investigate what happen. A pregnant woman swore at a man with arms akimbo in the market area. "I won't pay the fee!" she angrily screeched, "You plainly bully me! Okay, ask your supervisor to come here. I'll ask him if I have to pay so much fee!" The man said: "Don't be so fierce, if you don't pay the fee, you can't sell your fruit here no matter who collects the fee." More and more people gathered here, many pairs of eyes followed their movement. No one spoke. The pregnant woman continued to shout: "Don't cheat me. I don't believe you! Ask your supervisor to talk with me. Everybody knows what you are. Shameless!" Then she turned to the surrounding people. She began to explain what happened and asked them to have it out. The



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surrounding people began to judge the right and wrong between two sides. The man quickly left the crowd.

The woman was a villager of Ku Village. People called her A Ling. Her husband was a disabled army-man. For her family's livelihood, she had to set up a fruit stall in Songkou town and sold the fruit she produced. She had set up the stall for a long time. But today a man of the Industry and Commerce Bureau suddenly collected the tax from her. He asked her to pay two *yuan* per day. She felt it was unreasonable to pay two *yuan* because she could not even earn two *yuan* in a day. She said: "I am willing to pay the fee at a reasonable amount."

The next day, the supervisor came and told her that she had to pay the fee in accordance with regulation. But because her husband was a disabled army-man, she only had to pay two *jiao* per day. What a great difference! Sister Ling in the end paid the stall fee because she thought two *jiao* was reasonable. She said that "two *yuan*" was just set by the low-level staffs without the permission of the government. "They arbitrarily decide the amount of fee and put the money in their pocket," Sister Ling said.

This is a story that happens in rural China everyday. It reveals the conflicts between local cadres and peasants based on respective interest. In this story, we can find that peasants are not so powerless as we thought. Ling's family is one among millions of peasants households which



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try to construct their own social world and livelihood, and fight for just treatment from the local cadres based on their own ideas of right and justice.

## II. Where are the Peasants?

We often take these daily activities for granted and claim them as marginal in the study of social movement or class relation because they are often unorganized, unsystematic, individual and opportunistic. More important, they have no revolutionary consequences. In the historical records and archives, we rarely find the record of peasants except when their activities are menacing to the interest of the state. A great deal of the recent works on the peasantry also only concerns rebellions and revolution. Much attention has been devoted to organized, large-scale, protest movements that appear to put a threat to the state. Charles Tilly's view on social movement represents the popular notion of social science,

*Somehow a social movement should be more durable than a fleeting encounter... it should pursue broader aims than the blocking of a particular toll....[the participants] were aware of their common interests and distinct identity, that they were self-consciously seeking a set of changes considerably larger than the suspension of one tax or another, then we might comfortably begin to think in terms of a social movement (Tilly, 1984:297-317).*

If we adopt this perspective to study the social movement, we will undoubtedly find the simple fact that peasants



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throughout most of history have rarely been afforded the luxury of open, organized, political activity. In Chinese history, the large-scale peasant rebellion is just a sprinkling in several thousands of years. Because of this, peasantry is regarded as powerless, apolitical, and passive. One of the most famous comments and analysis on peasantry is Marx's "potatoes analogy". Within Marxist tradition, peasants are unorganized and powerless in political action. As he states,

*In this way, great mass of the French nation is formed by simple addition of homologous magnitudes, much as potatoes in sack form a sack of potatoes....In so far as there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond and no political organization among them, they do not form a class. They are consequently incapable of enforcing their class interest in their own name, whether through a parliament or through a convention. They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented (Marx, 1987:332).*

Marx's view on French peasants greatly influences the political analysis of peasantry. Customarily, peasants are invisible in political analysis. As Kelliher states, "[A]nyone familiar with the field of third-world politics can readily think of books on the predominantly agrarian countries that barely mention the peasantry" (Kelliher, 1992:233). Even when they are visible in the analysis, their role are often passive and subordinate.

In the studies of agrarian transformation in post-Mao China, Chinese peasants are still treated as a powerless and unorganized group, and as nearly irrelevant to



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political and economic outcomes. When government policies come across difficulties and encounter peasants' resistance, they often attribute the fault to the backward "mentality of petty peasants" (*xiaonong yishi*) -- that peasants are conservative, unprogressive, unchanging and anti-market. So the state policies can be only carried out through compulsory means. Under this analysis, peasants just passively respond to the different policies which compulsorily exert on them. The agrarian transformation in China is intuitively considered as the result of rural reform under Deng by many Chinese and foreign scholars. As before, the official press serves to adulate the "great role" of Deng Xiao Ping's government in conceiving and directing the reform. That means Deng and his government first analyzed the shortcomings of Mao's collective economy and then carried out their market-oriented economy in village. Finally, Deng's economic policy brought the dying rural economy back to life and won the hearts of the peasants (Li, 1992; Tan, 1990). In short, they portray Chinese reform as a case of successful policy implementation.<sup>1</sup> The following statement can be often found in official stories.

*In the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in 1978, our party determined the basic line of "one theme, two basic points" (base on the theme of economic development, insist the reform and open*

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<sup>1</sup>. In Daniel Kelliher's *Peasants Power in China*, he strongly criticized this version that rural reform was brought out by government.



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*door policy, and insist four basic rules). Centred on the fundamental line, our party made a series of rural economic policies.... Experiences have shown that the rural policies of our party are completely accurate (Li, 1992:1).*

This version of China's rural transformation once again kicks the peasants downstairs from the 'historical stage'. Peasants are treated as supporting or minor actors in the transformation, while the rural reform is considered as the government's bestowing favour and kindness to peasants. Most Chinese and foreign representations also like to idealize the impact of rural reform and peasants' life in village after reform. Many reports emphasize the occurrence of "ten thousands income households" (*wangyuan hu*) in rural China after rural reform (Li, 1992; Liu, Huang & Yang, 1992; Wen & Chen, 1992; Tan, 1990). The romantic portraits of peasants life are greatly overdrawn and mislead us into thinking that the historical transformation of China will benefit all the Chinese and will bring them to the "golden road" (*jinguan dadao*). Actually, this kind of official story not only hides the discontent of peasants towards the rural reform, but also dissembles the conflict between state and peasants.

Historical evidences of China and other countries have challenged these bias against peasants. They have shown that peasants are able to change their fortune and influence the social and political development by using different kinds of political action including the offensive



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and defensive ones (Shanin, 1966; Scott, 1989; Hobsbawn, 1973). Scott's study on Malaysian village has come to the conclusion that peasants are not powerless. They often employ the everyday forms of resistance to fight for those who seek to extract labor, food, taxes, and interest from them. This perspective has been adopted by some scholars to study the peasant society of the Third World and communist states (Kochanowics, 1989; Guha, 1989; Jimenez, 1989; Colburn, 1989; Herbst, 1989; Hart, 1991; Kerkvliet, 1991). The empirical data of China shown by different scholars also point out that peasants do not just passively accept or resist the state policies, they are knowledgeable and capable of creating their livelihood. In Mao's China, the peasants adopted different strategies to resist the state policy. The peasants in Anhui, Sichuan, Henan, Shandong and so on widely practised the "responsibility system of production" before Deng's policy announcement (Kelliher, 1993; Watson, 1984-85; Zhong, 1990; Zweig, 1989).

To understand the historical transformation of rural China and to fairly assess the reform in the post-Mao era, in addition to the official story, we have to hear another voice and grasp the view of peasants. So I will treat the everyday practice of peasants more seriously in this study. For that purpose, I use a south China village (I call Ku Village) as an empirical case for me to construct other stories told by the peasants whether or not they agree with



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the official version. It defends an unfashionable thesis about an unfashionable class -- peasantry -- in our world. The aim is to bring the peasants back to the political analysis and to re-emphasize the peasants power in political studies. I will argue that peasants have the capability to influence the outcome of state policy and construct their own livelihood. Whether in Mao's China or post-Mao China, peasants always adopt the everyday forms of resistance as their strategies to protect their own interest. Throughout this paper, there are three themes I will focus on closely. 1) What kind of power relationship between the local cadres and peasants exists in Ku Village in Mao and post-Mao China? 2) Why and how is the power relationship changed or maintained between these two parties after rural reform in post-Mao China? 3) How and why do peasants resist those who intend to extract the interest from them. In the following chapters, I will present the empirical findings of Ku Village, focusing on these three themes.

### **III. Back to the Village, Search for the Peasants**

To comprehend the dynamic of local politics and the daily practice of power, a macro-institutional approach seems to be inadequate. So I will employ an actor-oriented approach in this research. An actor-oriented approach emphasizes the importance of placing actors on the



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centre stage of analysis. According to Long's opinion, an advantage of this approach is that

*one begins with an interest in explaining differential responses to similar structural circumstances, even if the conditions appear relatively homogeneous (Long, 1992:21).*

The essence of this approach is that concepts and theories are grounded in the everyday life experiences and understandings of local people, be they peasants, entrepreneurs, government officials, or researchers. More important, an actor-oriented approach assumes that the differential patterns that arise are in part the creation of the actors themselves. Social actors are not simply seen as disembodied social categories or passive recipients of intervention, but active participants who process information and strategies in their dealings with various local actors as well as with outside institutions and personnel. In Giddens' view,

*In following the routines of my day-to-day life I help reproduce social institutions that I played no part in bringing into being... my actions constitute and reconstitute the institutional conditions of actions of others, just as their actions do mine... My activities are thus embedded within, and are constitutive elements of, structured properties of institutions stretching well beyond myself in time and space (Giddens, 1987:11)*

So actors participate in social change not as passive subjects of the economic, social or institutional structures, but rather as agents whose strategies and interactions shape the outcome of development. In addition, the different patterns of social organizations



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result from the interactions, negotiations, and social struggles that take place between the several kinds of actors (Giddens, 1987; Long, 1992).

However, emphasizing the actors does not mean that I will omit the more 'macro' side of the picture. I will also present the macro-institutional change in rural China. No one can deny the institutional constraints on the interaction of peasants and state. So the articulation between structure and agency will not be left out in this research. But I still find it reasonable to maintain that understanding of the macro phenomena must be built upon the exploring of the micro process. I strongly agree with Long that:

*all forms of external intervention necessarily enter the existing life-worlds of the individuals and social groups affected, and in this way are mediated and transformed by these same actors and structures (Long, 1992).*

In order to provide detailed answers to these questions, I stayed in Ku Village about a month in autumn of 1993 and I returned to village again in Chinese New Year holiday of 1994. Ku Village is located in Mei county of North Guangdong. It is a single-lineage village like many other Chinese villages. All the members of the village are surnamed Ku, and their ancestors have lived many generations in the past.

I adopt participant observation and in-depth interviews in this research. Participant observation is



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the study of people in their own time and space, and in their own everyday lives. Before China opened to outsiders, it was impossible for western scholars to live in a Chinese village to observe firsthand the daily life of village. Most previous researches conducted by western scholars in the 70s and 80s were through interviews with the Chinese emigrants in Hong Kong or other places.<sup>2</sup> The disadvantage of this method is that the researcher can not understand the social situation and local context of the interviewees. The misunderstanding may cause misinterpreting the data and hence the distortion of the social reality. On the other hand, the advantage of participant observation is direct observation, not just of how people acts, but also of how they understand or experience those acts. It enables us to juxtapose what people say they are up to against what they actually do (Burawoy, 1991; Babbie, 1987; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The purpose of field work also helps us to discover and perhaps change our biases through interaction with others. For example, after interacting with the villagers and participating into the daily activities in Ku Village, I understand the duality of the peasants' resistance to state policy -- not just for material interest, but also for the

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<sup>2</sup>. The famous ones are Parish and Whyte's *Village and Family in Contemporary China* (University of Chicago Press, 1978); Chan, Madsen and Unger's *Chen Village* (University of Californian Press, 194); Oi's *State and Peasant in Contemporary China* (University of California Press, 1986); and Walder's *Communist Neo-Traditionalism* (University of California Press, 1986).



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principle of justice and equity. Moreover, peasants are not powerless and passive in accepting the policies imposed on them, but they employ their own strategies to protect their own interest. So I believe that if we are to achieve a better understanding of Chinese local politics, it is better to live in Chinese society, as a participant observer of the daily pattern of Chinese social life, and collect first-hand data in the field.

In the village, I lived in a villager's (my paternal uncle) home. His family is just like the other peasant households. So living in his home I can also experience the peasants' life of Ku Village. Everyday I talked to different villagers and asked the villagers to speak about various aspects of the village's recent history (both Maoist and post-Maoist period) in minute detail and express their opinion on Mao's China and the reform under Deng. I also observed many things that happened in those months, such as when somebody gets hurt in working, quarrelling between the villagers, and many different events. In the village, I also participated in some activities such as spreading manure, offering sacrifices to ancestor and so on. This made me understand more their daily life pattern. Acting as an observer, I also observed the pattern of interaction between the villagers and local cadres. I tried to understand their action, the meaning of their words, and their morality.



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As this village is my father's home town, the villagers treated me as one of them, and they were often willing to answer any question I asked even on some sensitive topics.<sup>3</sup> This helped me learn that the establishment of trust between researcher and local people is very important to field research.

In-depth interviews were taken to interview the village (*cun*) cadres and administrative region (*guanli*) cadres. I took in-depth interview because the village cadres rarely interact with the villagers after decollectivization. They also work in their fields like the other peasant households. To understand their relation with villagers, participant observation is not adequate to explore the reality. So in-depth interviews becomes necessary. The interviews usually lasted for two hours. In several interviews, I mainly asked the questions about the policy implementations including land distribution, responsibility system, family planning, tax collection and other issues. I also asked the sensitive questions about cadre-peasant relations and their opinions on different government policies. All my questions include both Mao's and post-Mao's China.

Apart from participant observation and in-depth interview, some policy documents, census and statistical

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<sup>3</sup>. The ability to speak Hakka language was important for me to establish a good relationship with the local people. They often taught me about speaking Hakka. When I spoke accurately, they were very happy.



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data were also collected from the government departments. These data are used to reflect the historical background of Ku Village.

It is well known that Chinese villages are quite diverse, and the implementation of state policy and the local response vary considerably by time and place. So it is unnecessary to consider my case as "typical" of Chinese rural society. I strongly agree that "each Chinese village will have a somewhat different story to tell" and they reflect part of reality of Chinese society (Chan, Madsen & Unger, 1991:2).<sup>4</sup>

## IV. Summary of the Thesis

To provide a clear sense of the change of relationship between state and peasants under Deng, in Chapter Two I will critically review the current salient theoretical perspectives of the local politics in rural China. I will pick up Oi's "clientelism" and Scott's "everyday forms of resistance" as the theoretical standpoint of my thesis. I will construct the conceptual framework of my thesis

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<sup>4</sup>. It is normal that some scholars may question my research that one case is incapable of generalization and inherently "micro" and ahistorical. But I want to pinpoint that the strength of single case study is to generalize the logical causality rather than statistical correlation, no matter how atypical the case is. According to Burawoy's view, we seek the reconstruction of existing theory (extended case method). This method attempts to elaborate the effects of "macro" on the "micro". The strategy of this method is not to look for the similarities among disparate case, but to focus on differences between similar cases. Then we reconstruct the existing theories through explanation of the particular feature of the social situation (Burawoy, 1991). So in research, I use counter-instance to reconstruct and improve theories rather than reject theories.



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mainly based on these two theories. Then I will (Chapter Three) historically review the social and political pattern of Ku Village in Mao China. In Chapters Four and Five, I will examine the political and economic change of rural China and its impact on the power relationship between state and peasants in Ku Village. In these chapters, I will try to explain why and how the patron-client bond are broken down after the rural reform in post-Mao China. In Chapter Six, I will describe the everyday struggle between the village cadres and peasants. These findings will confirm the peasants' power and the significance of the everyday resistance of the peasants. In Chapter Seven, based on the empirical data, I will synthesize the whole research and propose the unsolved questions.



## Chapter Two

### Understanding Local Politics of Rural China

*Engels elucidates the concept of the "power" which is called the state , a power which arose from society but place itself above it and alienates itself more and more from it. What does this power mainly consist of? It consists of special bodies of armed men having prisons, etc, at their command.*

---- Lenin, 1967.

Chinese communist revolution destroyed the traditional power structures in rural society. The landlords have been removed from the historical stage while the state and its agents appears as the new power in rural society. The promise of no classes, no inequality, no coercion, no subordination and so forth becomes a mere scrap of paper to Chinese peasants. Actually, the state becomes the "big landlord" (*da dizhu*). It monopolizes the grain purchasing and distribution, regulates grain prices, dictates cropping patterns, imposes output targets, and directly extracts grain to feed the cities and finance industrial development. Tax, resources and grain extraction are still the basic issues of peasant politics, which brings the state and its agents into conflict with its peasantry.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>. In Bernhardt's *Rents, Taxes, and Peasants Resistance*, he studies the rents and taxes relation between the state, landlord and peasants, and explains the account for the peasants resistance in the late-Qing and Republican period (Bernhardt, 1992). Tax struggle is always the root of conflict between state and peasants society throughout the Chinese history.



## *Understanding the Rural Politics*

### **I. State-society in Communist China**

To understand the state-society in communist China, the totalitarian model was widely accepted by western analysts in the 1950s and early 1960s. The concept of "totalitarianism" emphasizes the capacity of state bureaucracy to dominate society directly (Westshy, 1985). In a totalitarian state, power is highly concentrated at the political centre, and the centre is capable of both monitoring and controlling their society and citizens through resource monopoly, military control and so on. This model seems to discount the ability of society to influence state policy and decision making. It stresses the effectiveness of a totalitarian state to mobilize and control the ideology of its members under a formal and impersonal organizational system. It overlooks the power of the subordinate groups to resist and influence state policy, at the same time affecting policy implementation and pursuing interest through informal channels. Citizens are depicted as atomized, passive and politically ineffectual in this model (Walder, 1987; Oi, 1989; Shue, 1988).

The totalitarian model fell out of favour in the late 1960s and 1970s. In rural areas, a growing literature argued that through the post-1949 period the "reach of state" has been shorter than totalitarian model suggests. Shue's localism and other research reflect that local adaptation and distortion of central policies has been a



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basic feature of the Chinese political system. The local state or cadres do not passively accept the policy and will of state in an one-way dimension of power relationship. They also have the autonomy and flexibility to implement state policy and adopt different kinds of strategies to bargain with upper government (Lampton, 1987; Oksenberg, 1974; Lieberthal & Oksenberg, 1988; Oi, 1985, 1989; Shue, 1988; Zweig, 1984; Scott, 1985; Manion, 1991).

However, localism too emphasizes (exaggerates) on the ability of local officials to limit central state penetration and control of rural village. It posits that the state never decisively penetrated the Chinese village and its peasant mentality. It also juxtaposes and idealizes the role of local officials as traditional gentry, who occupy the same local zone of power, and are often in a position to bargain with central authority according to the interest of village masses. Shue takes this argument as she believes that China's new type of rural leaders do not represent such a dramatic break with the past (Shue, 1988). In addition, she regards the localism as an unintended consequence of state policies which have the net effect of "making the identification of individuals with their own locality", and "strengthening the solidarity and the interests of peasants communities against outside, statist domination" (Shue, 1988:53). The local officials at all levels self-interestedly loyal to the districts in which they served. They distort, deflect



## *Understanding the Rural Politics*

and frequently thwart state policy and become an effective buffer between the community and state.

I think that local cadres' political action may have some similarities with traditional gentry but not necessary the same. It is because local cadres are integrated into the formal bureaucratic system, but not the traditional gentry. The power and privilege of local cadres are granted by state and in this sense they heavily depend on the state for their legitimacy. Even though the brigade and team leaders' income are directly related to the production of the village, their interests are not necessary the same as those of the peasants because their positional advantage helps them search for their self interest. In contrast, the legitimacy of traditional gentry are granted by villagers based on their ability of holding expensive ceremonies, making large religious contributions and giving personal loans and donations and so forth. So they are often elected by villagers to represent them in bargaining with the state (Duara, 1987; Siu, 1989; Zhang, 1991; Fei, 1982, 1992). So treating local cadres and peasants as the same interest group will hide the fact of conflict and struggle between the peasants and village cadres.

## **II. State and Its Agents**

The term "state" can refer to the central government and its directives. We are clear that not all the levels



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of state have power to formulate policy, and that the levels of policy implementation are not necessarily the same ones that they formulated or intended.<sup>2</sup> In this thesis, my focus is on the "local state". It is necessary to distinguish "local state" and the broad term "state". The "local state" here refers to the lowest level of administrative organizations which have no power to formulate policy but only have power to interpret and implement it. To peasants, the local state is more concrete because they often directly interact with these organizations. In rural China, according to the administrative hierarchy, the local government refers to the administrative region (*guan liqu*) and villagers' committee (*cun weihui*), sometimes village small group (*cun xiaozu*). The leaders in these organizations are the local cadres.

How to define "local" is also very controversial among different scholars.<sup>3</sup> Some scholars such as Shue treats "local" as including the commune, brigade and production team (Shue, 1988). However, I think that it is quite negligent to mix up these three levels of organization because their power and resources, role and status are

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<sup>2</sup>. The villagers in my case always confuse the concept of central government, provincial government, township government, commune, state and other state organizations. They indiscriminately refer "state" to "the party" (*dang*) or "the government" (*zhengfu*) as "state" (*guojia*).

<sup>3</sup>. Different scholars treat different levels of administrative organizations as local. For example, Shue looks "local" as including the commune, bridge and production team in Mao China. Oi refers to "local" only as the bridge and production team.



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quite different. Formally, in the state's hierarchical system, the commune is the lowest level of state administration. Only commune-level leaders are considered 'state cadres' (*guojia ganbu*), receiving salaries from the state payroll and ration coupons for their grain. In contrast, brigade and team cadres are considered 'local cadres' (*difang ganbu*), whose wages and grain rations come from village coffers; they are still officially required to participate in collective labour (Oi, 1989). These cadres day-to-day and face-to-face interact with the peasants. They act as the bridge between state and peasants. As Siu states,

*Rural cadres were faced with an organized state machinery of which they were a part. They were also part of...rural society (Siu, 1989:9).*

In my peasants' sense, they also regard the leader of brigade and team as "local cadres". It is because in rural China, the conflict and struggle over land, resource, harvest, water management, child bearing and daily activities between peasants and state take place at these two levels, not at the commune or township level. In fact, peasants' interaction with the state are filtered through these local cadres. These cadres engage in a day-to-day relationship with peasants and routinely interpret state policy for them. Although they are not "state cadres", they are state agents. To the peasant, they represent the state because they implement state policy and control the upward flow of information (Oi, 1989; Siu, 1989). So the



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role of local cadres can be confusing. They sometimes represent the state, but they sometimes represent the peasants. The important point for me is not only to clarify which party they represent, but at what condition they represent state or peasants.

So I do not adopt the commune level as a useful unit of analysis because it only represents the unit of administration. In my view, "local" refers only to the lowest level of administrative organizations which have no power to formulate policy but have power to implement it. They can be seen as the intersection of state and peasants.

The major reorganization of rural administrative system took place in 1982. The highest level of rural administration, the commune, returned to the "township" (*xiang* or *zhen*). Similarly, the production brigade, the second tier of commune administration, was converted to the administrative region or villager's committee (*guan liqu* or *cun weihui*). The lowest level, the production teams, became the villager's committee or village small groups (*cun weihui* or *cun xiaozu*).<sup>4</sup> As with the commune, the township only represents the lowest level of administrative unit, but not the units of production or accounting, and peasants do not directly participate in politics at this level. In this research, therefore, the **level of analysis** is focused

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<sup>4</sup>. The *cun xiaozu* is the lowest level when the village population is large. But if the village population is small, *cun weihui* is the lowest one.



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on the brigade and production team in Mao's era, *guan liqu* and *cun weihui* in post-Mao era.

### III. Socialist Clientelism in Rural China

To understand the local politics at the village level, Oi's clientelism is a helpful framework. Political clientelism has emerged as a major growth point in social science analyses and no longer is the concept restricted to the field of social anthropology. Increasing efforts are being made by sociologists and political scientists to investigate its empirical roots and theoretical ramification (Eisenstadt & Lemarchand, 1981; Eisenstadt & Roniger, 1980; Eisenstadt, 1984). In recent year, clientelism has been employed to analyze the communist system. (Tarkowski, 1981; Baker, 1982; Rigby, 1970). Students of communist politics regularly note the importance of personal ties, and the significance of informal bonds in economic and political spheres in communist society. Clientelism is also employed by Jean Oi to analyze the village politic of China.

According to Scott, the patron-client relationship can be defined as:

*a special case of dyadic (two-person) ties involving a largely instrumental friendship in which an individual of higher socio-economic status (patron) uses his own influence and resources to provide protection and/or benefits for a person of lower status (client) who, for his part, reciprocates by offering general support and assistance, including personal services, to the patron (Scott, 1972:8).*



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Two characteristics of the patron-client dyad are its basis in inequality and its diffuse flexibility as a system of personal exchange (Scott, 1972; Eisenstadt & Roniger, 1980). As an analytical type, clientelism guides comparisons of rural politics by focusing on two institutional features. First is the resource dependency and control in vertical political system, and second is the networks of instrumental-personal ties between the superior and subordinate.

### *A. Resources Dependence and Control*

Clientelism recognizes the constraints placed on individual behaviour by the system of surveillance and political control, and stresses the positive incentives offered for compliance. Political loyalty is rewarded systematically with income opportunities, special distribution, and so forth that the officials of government are able to dispense. From the clientelist perspective, the authority of state is derived from its monopolistic control of allocating opportunities, goods and resources. It ensures the local government to represent the will of central because local governments and organizations highly depend on the distribution of resources from the central. The organizations are also the focal points for the delivery of public goods, services, and other material and social advantages that are not readily available from other



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sources. So the individuals also highly depend on their organizations for satisfaction of their needs (Oi, 1985 & 1989; Walder, 1986; Lu, 1989).

In rural China, after collectivization, participation in collective labour became the only means of obtaining grain outside the black market where price was high and supply was uncertain. At the same time, in collective agriculture, all peasants in China also enjoyed a certain security level or subsistence guarantee. Each peasant was to receive a monthly minimum amount of grain as a basic ration (*jiben kouliang*), independent of work points. Because individuals lacked availability of alternative sources for the satisfaction of their needs, they became the clients to the organization to which they belonged (Oi, 1985 & 1989). So that "the greater the proportion of needs satisfied by the enterprise and the fewer the alternatives, the more dependent is the labour force" (Walder, 1986).

In the clientelist political system, individuals not only socially and economically depend on the organization, they also personally depend on their leaders. It is because team leaders derive authority from their ability to influence the distribution of rewards in collective agriculture. They have power to influence the work distribution of everyday, opportunities for outside employment, and the allocation of welfare and relief. It forces the peasants to depend on their leader to fulfil



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their needs and to keep good relationships (*gaohao guanxi*) with their leader for pursuing their interests.

### *B. Networks of Instrumental-Personal Ties*

Clientelism posits a paradox of communist political system which develops stable networks of loyal clients, who exchange their loyalty and support for preference in income opportunities and other rewards. The crux of Oi's argument is the predominance of personalized access to the power of allocation which deflects direct and formalised state control. Participation is viewed not merely as formal input in the policy-formulation process. Instead, it focuses on the way non-elites try to affect the policy implementation process and to further their particular interest.<sup>5</sup> The clientelist model assumes considerably more flexibility, subjectivity, and personal sentiment in the exercise of control that may or may not result in effective policy implementation. Moreover, as Walder points out:

*...these impersonal standards dictate preferential treatment in return for loyalty and ideological adherence, and standard party leadership practices require the cultivation of stable networks of such activists in all social settings (Walder, 1986:6).*

The result is a highly institutionalized network of patron-client relations that is maintained by the party and

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<sup>5</sup>.For example, in her book, she explains the deviant behaviour of local cadres keeping grain from the state is not simply a case of personal greed to the desire of peasants to consume more grain. She argues that it is a form of peasant participation and strategies for survival.



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is integral its rule. Moreover, the clientelism posits a rich subculture of instrumental-personal ties through which individuals circumvent formal regulations to obtain official approval and other resources controlled by the low-level officials. These client-patron ties are structurally encouraged by the political and economic system of communist party, which creates scarcity and leaves so many legal and distributional decisions to the discretion of lower-ranking officials. So the individuals often exchange their loyalty and support and become clients to their leaders and superiors for pursuing their interest.

Because of the exchanged relationship, the clientelist model also emphasizes that the relationship between different parties was not a simple one-sided dependency. The patrons also depend on their clients in turn because they needed their cooperation to fulfil state policy and control the other non-clients. The state depends on the local cadres to implement the policy and the local cadres depend on the peasants' cooperation in production. If the local cadres do not cooperate with government, the goal of state policy can not be achieved. At the same time, if the peasants do not cooperate with local cadres, they will fail to meet the goal of government; and if the cadres do not fulfil their official duties, they are subject to sanctions by their supervisor. So the local cadres exchange preferences to rank-and-file peasants for loyalty and support.



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In short, the characteristic of politics in China is the variety of patron-client relationships at each level. Peasants are clients to local leaders and local leaders are clients to higher level leaders. Personal networks (*guanxi*) are integrated features of the state's capacity to rule, and this informal system of politics (clientelism) created by the communist system is an indispensable supplement to its formalised structures.

### IV. Everyday Form of Resistance in Village

The clientelist model has made a significant contribution to our understanding on the formation of power relationship between the village cadres and peasants in rural society. However, it cannot help us fully understand the dynamic of power. This model omits or overlooks the power of peasants. From this perspective, we find that peasants are passive and powerless to resist the extraction from state and reconstruct their own livelihood. They can only be offered more benefits through exchanging their personal loyalty and support with the local cadres. However, the exercise of power is a challenge-response process. The peasants are not as powerless or passive as we imagined. They are capable of checking the unfair and injustice policy and social arrangement from those who want to extract their interest. To understand why and how the peasants resist and emphasizing the peasants power, I draw



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on James Scott's concept of "everyday forms of peasants resistance".

Supplementing the view of open and organized political action, Scott suggests a broader perspective of peasants politics, which treats the everyday practice of peasants more seriously. He argues that much of the politics of subordinate groups falls into the category of "everyday forms of resistance" which includes such acts as foot-dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, feigned ignorance, desertion, pilfering, smuggling, poaching, arson, slander, sabotage, surreptitious assault and murder, anonymous threats, and so forth (Scott, 1985, 1989 & 1990).

The striking feature of everyday resistance is that

*they require little or no coordination or planning; they make use of implicit understandings and informal networks; they often represent a form of individual self-help; they typically avoid any direct, symbolic confrontation with authority (Scott, 1985:29).*

The purpose of such resistance techniques is to avoid notice and detection. It reflects the tactical wisdom of peasants because peasants are always working the system to their minimum disadvantage (Hobsbawm, 1973; Scott, 1985;). As Scott points out, most of the subordinate classes are far less interested in changing the larger structures of the state and the law. They avoid conflict made open challenges to officialdom because such activity is dangerous and will probably be met with armed force and bloodshed (Scott, 1985; Burn, 1988). So no formal



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organization , no open and large-scale collective action, does not mean that peasants are powerless; on the contrary, it is because none is required.

Moreover, Scott thinks that the social structure of the peasantry is not suitable for them to employ the large-scale collective action owing to their geographical dispersion, a class scattered, lacking in formal organization, lacking in organizational skills and experience and so forth. In contrast to the classes higher in the social stratification, peasants lack a variety of political resources that allow them to influence the elites and officials, such as the political campaigns, lobbying, and legal assistance by which they can influence power. So for the peasants and other subordinate groups, everyday forms of resistance have been the only resort short of rebellion. Scott further elaborates that the everyday resistance is so common in socialist state just because of the institutional constraints.<sup>6</sup> The system of the socialist state allows little ways of resistance. The state directly controls the means of production and coercion, and typically forecloses open protest. Open,

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<sup>6</sup>. As Burn states, in China "state policy in most of the period tied peasants to the land. Authorities effectively prevented rural to urban migration through the household registration and rationing systems. China's leaders isolated the peasantry from itself and reduced opportunities for peasant interaction unsupervised by the party." Moreover, although authority established a nationwide network of peasants' associations, with branches organized in village, "these organizations were effectively controlled by the party. Peasants' associations functioned chiefly as a method of transmitting party policy to the countryside" (Burn, 1988:170-171). These constrain the organization and collective action of peasants.



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organized and radical confrontation will bring out a tragic outcome. So the resisters rarely intend to make a revolution and their actions do not openly challenge the existing power arrangement (Scott, 1989).

Scott also writes that the reasons for peasant resistance appear to have both a moral and a material basis. As Scott states:

*The struggle between rich and poor ... is not merely a struggle over work, property rights grain, and cash. It is also a struggle over how the past and present shall be understood and labelled, a struggle to identify causes and assess blame, a contentious effort to give partisan meaning to local history (Scott, 1985).*

So a purely economic-interest account of such resistance is inadequate because the peasantry have a host of principal reasons underlying their resistance such as equities, justice, fairness. Scott thinks that if the norm of justice is broken by those who intend to extract interest from them, the peasants will fight for their self-interest.

Although much of the everyday resistance is comprised of individual actions, this is not to say that these actions lack coordination. Scott believes that underlying the everyday resistance, there is a consensus and consciousness among the villagers. Scott states that:

*One of the striking things about peasant society is the extent to which a whole range of complex activities from labour exchange to wedding preparations to rituals are coordinated by networks of understanding and practice. It is the same with boycotts, with techniques for evading taxes and forced crop delivers, and with*



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*the conspiracy of silence surrounding thefts from landlords (Scott, 1989:23).*

Although there is a variety of practices among the resisters without formal cooperation and organization, they actually have unity of purpose. They share similar values and knowledge. Silence, tacit complicity and hiding the fact of resistance of other villagers are another form of cooperation between the peasants. Scott thinks that there is no requirement that resistance take the form of collective action.

In Scott's view, to the subordinate class and peasants, this everyday form of resistance is the most significant way of resistance because first, it avoids the direct meeting with armed force and bloodshed, and minimize their lost; second, it increases the management cost of government although government can determine to prosecute thousands of cases, raise the penalties for noncompliance, and appoint more enforcement personnel. So the everyday resistance is the relatively safe technique peasants often employed. It is the choice of peasants, but not due to their impotence. Peasants rarely intend to make revolution, and their actions do not openly challenge existing power arrangement. So it is undoubted that we often find there is little open confrontation from peasants.

Therefore, Scott's concept of "everyday forms resistance" provides us a wider view of resistance and



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class struggle, which intends to bring the peasants back in the political stage and emphasizes the power of peasants and subordinate groups. Treating the everyday practice of the peasants more seriously, we will widen our view of the dynamic of power.

### **V. The Changing Village Politics under Deng**

Social change in rural China has received much scholarly attention as the rural reform launched in the late 1970s basically altered the political and economic structure of rural society. In post-Mao China, the abandonment of the communes, the recurrence of family farming and free markets have greatly influenced Chinese peasants' life. Chinese peasants, free from the constraints of collective agriculture, can diversify their production away from the singular emphasis on grain production. They not only can decide what they produce, but also can exchange their products and surplus in the re-opened markets. Additionally, many of them leave their villages and move to the cities. Most scholars are concerned with the impact of rural reform on state-peasants relation and cadres power, which is also my concern in this thesis.

There are different opinions about the change of state-peasant relations in post-Mao China. Some analysts (eg. Zweig, 1983 & 1984) conclude that the rural reforms have destroyed the power of state to control local society



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as policy distortion and misinterpretation often occur in post-Mao China. Others (eg. Watson, 1984-85) show that local cadres have lost their power as a result of the reforms because the growth of markets provides the range of opportunities outside the boundaries of the redistributive economy. The cadres now lose their positional advantage in controlling the life chances of the peasants. Some scholars (eg. Shue, 1988 & 1990) worry that the reforms have succeeded in destroying the power of local cadres who are the peasants' "protective buffer" against the state. They also consider that the introduction of market forces have broken the solidarity of the village that will strengthen the state control on the village society. But some (eg. Oi, 1986 & 1992; Nee, 1991b & 1992; White, 1990) think that reforms do not dismantle the government command structure because the local cadres still control the allocation of resources, investment and management of local enterprises and so on. So the power relationship only changed in form but not in nature. In other words, peasants under Deng are still powerless and controlled by local cadres.

Continuing to employ the clientelist model as my framework to study the village politics in post-Mao China, I will ask if the patron-client bond still continues in rural China. Some research conducted in post-Mao China suggests to us that the village politics only altered in



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form, but maintained in the nature of clientelism (Nee, 1989, 1991 & 1992; Oi, 1986, 1990 & 1992).

They think that the local government still plays as an owner of corporation after decollectivization of agriculture because it owns public property such as enterprise, various pieces of equipment as well as forest land, orchards, fish ponds and so on. So it has the right to offer a certain individuals permission to operate the corporation's property or business. As Oi states:

*Although peasants are no longer dependent on the team to allocate their grain rations or to determine the amount or kind of agricultural work they must do, they still need authorization to leave the team for any length of time, and local level recommendations for certain jobs and training, and for loans. Moreover, peasants are still dependent on centralized distribution -- and by extension, local officials -- for agriculture inputs, including seed, chemical fertilizer, and most importantly, the allocation of land (Oi, 1985:264-265).*

In addition, fiscal reform is another important factor to keep the power of local government since fiscal reform has assigned the new role of local government as a corporation. As Oi state:

*The major objectives were to make localities fiscally self-sufficient, to reduce the central state's own fiscal burden, and to provide incentives for local authorities to promote economic development. The most important of the fiscal reforms was a tax responsibility system for each administrative level down to the township. By the mid-1980s, provinces, municipalities, prefectures, counties, and townships were subject to bottom-up revenue-sharing system that required localities to submit only a portion of their revenues to the upper levels and then allowed them to retain all, or at*



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least most, of the remainder (Oi, 1992:102-103).

So the local governments become independent fiscal entities that have both responsibility for local expenditures and the unprecedented right to use the revenue they retained. This stimulates the local governments to pursue their interest as a corporation which tries to maximize its profits. The best way to maximize the profit is to develop rural industry and enterprise (Oi, 1992).

In terms of contract-responsibility system for rural enterprise, the local government is able to maintain effective control on the financial flow of village and township industries. The relationship between contractors of enterprise and the local government is much more complex than the bare outlines of the responsibility system would indicate. Actually, the contractors do not simply fulfil the taxes to the state, and pay the rent and management fee to the village and township government. As Oi states, the local governments still exert significant control over their enterprises through a web of rules and regulations. It continues to limit management autonomy, use of enterprise profits, access to credit, and allocation of investment opportunities and key inputs. Therefore, the dependency relation between the local government and villagers continues.

So in rural China, the local cadres function like corporate boards of directors. Village cadres, township



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heads, and leaders of economic commissions make decisions ranging from spending, investment, and loans to hiring and also make provisions to assist their enterprises in acquiring credits and needed inputs. Apart from controlling the local resource, local governments acting as a corporation try to provide the services and benefits to the villagers. They still take the role as local patron. Oi thinks that localities having rural industry can provide more services and are more likely to be strong effective governments, and vice versa. It is because the village with highly developed industries will extract more funds and make more profit from the enterprises. Therefore, the rural enterprises and industries form the new basis of cadres power. The extraction of profits from enterprises is one of the most important mechanisms for the local governments to operate as a corporation, and the power of local government is correlated with the level of industrialization of that rural areas (Oi, 1990 & 1992).

Additionally, although the market mechanism gradually erodes the redistributive power of state and its gatekeeper, market forces are still constrained and dominated by continued bureaucratic micro-intervention. On the one hand, the local cadres keep their position in state bureaucracy, on the other hand, they participate in private business. Thus the partial reform in China gives rise to hybrid elite of cadre-entrepreneurs. In post-Mao China, cadre-entrepreneurs structurally locate in networks that



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allow them to maximize benefits from both the public and private sectors of the socialist mixed economy. They often distort the allocative mechanism of the market involving the personal connection within the state organizations. They are likely to experience lower transaction costs on trade across the boundaries of the redistributive and private economies, which may provide them with more ready access to scarce resources and marketing outlets. Hence, peasants and entrepreneurs often have to seek to establish the personal connection (*guanxi*) with the local cadres, who hold pivotal position, to gain access to resource and marketing outlets. Because of this, the patron-client bond is still maintained after the rural reform (Nee, 1991 & 1992).

In short, the local government tries to keep the collective power under the economic reform. Industry forms the new basis of the collective (corporation) in which the cadres still controls the resource and provides the benefit to the clients (rural enterprise and peasants) like in Commune era. The market becomes the other source of cadres' power. So the local state still acts as a patron despite the change of the agricultural organization and introduction of market mechanism. The local cadres still frequently act as brokers or middlemen in exchanges between peasants and the state. They negotiate household quota production with the state, collect taxes and other fees, and control permits to engage in business, and enforce



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regulation. The patron-client relationship only alters in form, but not in nature in rural China after rural reform. The power and privilege of officials actually does not diminish.

However, the empirical findings of my case suggest that the patron-client relationship between village cadres and peasants has been broken down in some rural areas like Ku Village. There is no need for the peasants to exchange their loyalty with village cadres for obtaining resources. After the reconstruction of the local administrative organization, the village organs have lost their outside support and back-up from the state. Moreover, the carrying out of responsibility system and the division of land, and the commercialization of local agriculture, have destroyed the power basis of the village cadres. In this study, I do not intend to reject other scholars' conclusion that the patron-client bond between local cadres and peasants still maintains in rural China. I think the most important task in this thesis is *to explore how and why the patron-client bonds have eroded in Ku Village after rural reform in post-Mao China.*



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### Legacy of the Past -- Ku Village Under Mao

*There has never been a total break, an absolute discontinuity between the past, even the very distant past, and the present. Past experience continue into the present, adding to it.*

--- F. Braduel, 1977

I agree with Braduel's opinion that there has never been a total break between the past and the present. In order to understand the transformation of Ku Village after 1978, it is reasonable, here, to trace the history of Ku Village under Mao. So in this chapter, I intend to provide the background of the transformation of Ku Village in post-Mao China.

In 1949, like other villages of China, Ku Village was little different from what it was centuries before. Every day and every year, the villagers practised the similar production and interacted in the routine pattern. However, the Chinese Communist Revolution had fundamentally transformed these traditional villages. It destroyed the traditional rural elite and organization, and brought about the political and economic transformation of rural society. In this chapter, I will study the peasant life in Ku Village under Mao and map out the picture of the power relationship between peasants and village cadres.

To provide the answer in detail, in-depth interviews enabled me to develop a much more detailed and accurate picture of the nature of peasant life in Ku Village under



### *Ku Village Under Mao*

Mao. It is the history constructed by the collective memory of the villagers in Ku Village. It is their own history full of their feeling, which embodies their hope and disappointment, their joy and bitterness, their praise and disapprobation. I mainly interviewed the old villagers who experience the land reform, collectivization and other campaigns of communist party. My in-depth interviews were not necessarily formal, as I asked the information through the daily chatting with different villagers. My interviews had no time limit and no standard format. I am not sure if the peasants have lost their memory of past. Most of them cannot describe the past experience in detail. To the peasants, land reform and collectivization are campaigns with deep memories. So in this chapter, I will emphasize the land reform and collectivization in Ku Village. The statistical data of Songnan xiang is obtained from the official statistics and the statistical data of Ku Village is provided by the former accountant of Ku Village. In this and following chapters, to protect the privacy of the villagers and our interviewees, I have altered the names of all the people who appear in this thesis.

I try to systematically integrate the scattered data presented by different villagers into a standard set of topics: 1) the setting of Ku Village; 2) reconstructing the old political economy; 3) socialist clientelism in Ku Village.



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### I. The Setting of Ku Village

Ku Village is located on the far north of Mei county in Guangdong (see the Map I & Map II). It comes within the jurisdiction of Songnan Xiang. It is a single-lineage and small natural village as is common in rural China. In Ku Village, the population was about 260 in 1992 and its household totaled about 61 (see Table I). According to the former accountant, who keeps the census data and statistic data of Ku Village, the population of Ku Village stayed constant in these forty years.

Table I. Selected Statistic of Songnan Xiang and Ku Village

	Total Population		Total Household		Total Manpower		Arable Area unit: acres	
	Ku Village	Songnan Xiang	Ku Village	Songnan Xiang	Ku Village	Songnan Xiang	Ku Village	Songnan Xiang
1978	255	/	61	/	90	/	246	/
1981	/	16,515	/	4,044	/	6,541	/	13,772
1985	/	15,924	/	3,823	/	7,286	/	/
1992	260	16,723	61	4,090	95	7,535	228	12,848

Source: *Commune Statistic Data of Mei County in 1981; Statistic of Income Distribution of Agricultural Economy in Mei County in 1985; The Data of Basic Situation of Mei County's Villages in 1992*. The data of Ku Village is provided by the former accountant of Ku Village.

All the villagers engaged in agriculture. The predominant crop was paddy rice before 1978. The minor crops are vegetables, sweet potatoes, peanut, banana, sugar cane, oranges, tangerines and so on. There are only about 200 *mu* of arable land scattered in the mountain village, averaging 8 *fen* per villager (see Table I).<sup>1</sup> Before the

<sup>1</sup>. *Fen* is the unit of area. One *mu* is equal to ten *fen*.



### *Ku Village Under Mao*

rural reform in 1978, villagers' income mainly depended on the field of rice. As the income of Mei county was lower than national average income before rural reform, most area of Mei county was defined as "poor mountain region" (*pinkun shanqu*).

Ku Village is surrounded by a range of craggy mountain as in Chinese painting. There is a small stream running across Ku Village and field. The Villager told me that the stream joins with the main river (*Hang Jiang*) of Mei county. In mountainous area, Ku village is not so remote. But the transportation of Ku Village is poor as there is only one small path from Ku Village to Songkou town (the nearest market town). After a rain, the road will become muddy and rugged. People easily get stuck in the mud. From Ku Village to Songkou Town, if riding the bicycle, we have to spend 30 to 45 minutes. If walking, we have to spend more than an hour. If villagers go to the county seat, they have to take the long-distance bus in Songkou town. Travel to Mei county from Songkou town still requires half day. The mountain interferes with Ku Village's communication with the outside world.

Every village has its own story about its history. Ku Village also has the tale of the Ku lineage. Ku Village is a Hakka community. All the males are descended on their fathers' side from a common ancestor. According to the inscription on a tablet in Ku ancestors hall, the villagers' founder was the successful candidate in the



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highest imperial examination (*Jinshi*) of Ming Dynasty. They were settled there several hundred years. According to the history of the Hakka, Hakka had moved from inland (*Zhongyuan*) China to south China in the Xijin Dynasty to find refuge from war and famine.

A young villager, Brother Li, told me that there had been three lineages of other surnames long, long ago. But after several generations, the other lineages disappeared because of their wrong geomantic omen (*Fengshui*). Brother Li told me:

*The Fengshui of Ku Village is good. The range of mountains surrounding Ku Village is like an ancient folding chair, and the stream running across the village is like a jade waistband of traditional officials. This kind of Fengshui makes many descendants obtain the high honour in education and become the officials.*

To honour their ancestors and affirm their common roots in the past, the Kus built an ancestral hall within the village which kept the sacred tablets and records containing the genealogies of their village. On Chinese New Year or other important traditional festivals like *yuanxiao*, *zhongqiu*, the villager will offer sacrifices to their ancestors. The ancestral hall became the public property after collectivization. It became the grain store of the production team. The religious activities were also banned in the collective era. The hall was returned to villagers in the late 1970s and was repaired by the villagers.



## **II. Reconstructing the Old Political Economy**

Ku Village's conditions are not dissimilar to those of other villages located in peripheral areas that are distant from a central place. Its political and economic integration following land reform and collectivization has followed essentially the same pattern as other villages in China. Like other villages of China, Ku Village experienced the Communist Liberation in 1949, land reform in following year, then collectivization from mid-1950 to the 1960s, and finally the cultural revolution in the late 1960s. The first two movement brought greater impact in rural society rather than cultural revolution which mainly influence the city population.<sup>2</sup>

### ***A. Land Reform***

The news of the triumph of the communist party spread from Songkou town. The people who came back from town often brought the news to Ku Village. The new government became the subject of much discussion among the villagers. To the villagers, no matter the National Party or Communist Party, whoever can provide the good life for them is a good

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<sup>2</sup>. I do not means there was no impact by the Cultural revolution on rural society. In relative sense, the villagers of Ku Village think that Cultural Revolution is meaningless to them. Although I can find wall slogans of the Cultural Revolution elsewhere, the cadres told that it was only the fulfilment of state policy in form.



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government. The land reform in 1950s brought the hope to Kus.<sup>3</sup>

In 1950, the work team and military were sent to Mei county for carrying out the land reform. To the villagers, land reform was a terrible experience. They told me that the "mass struggle meeting" (*qunzhong pidou dahui*) of land reform was fierce. The rich peasants and so called "landlord" were arrested and their property and land were all expropriated. In the "struggle meeting", the landlord knelt on the ground and the poor peasants exposed his crimes. During the meeting, the angry peasants burnt the landlord's land deeds and shout slogans led by the work teams. If the "landlord" did not admit their guilt, they would be beaten by the angry masses. In the end of meeting, many landlords were "head broken and bleeding" (*toupo xueliu*). When Baba, an old female villager, recalled the land reform, her heart still fluttered with fear.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>. To the communist government, land reform has another kind of meaning. As many scholars believe, land reform introduced by Chinese Communist was not only to demolish the power and influence of the rural elite, but also to redistribute landholding in the village and give land to the peasants (Huang, 1990; Schurmann, 1968). It aimed to keep the promise to peasants and gain support from them which occupying at least 80% of total population.

<sup>4</sup>. The radicalism of land reform seems to indicate that state did not have full control over the action of villager cadres and local leader. In the state document (*Instruction on the Question of Checking Village Cadres' Unhealthy Tendencies of Working Attitude and Law of Land Reform of Chinese People Republic*), government clearly stated that cadres could not use the coercive method such as beating, killing, corporal punishment and so on to implement the land reform, but violence and coercion was prevalent in land reform. On 1st, December 1949, the Communist government passed on the policy - *Instruction on the Question of Checking Village Cadres' Unhealthy Tendencies of Working Attitude* [guanyu juizheng xiangcun gongzuo ganbu buliang zuofeng de jue ding de zhishi]. On 28th, June 1950, Chinese government



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At that time, all the villager were scared to death. Nobody dared to be fair and help the "landlord". They were our relatives. We really sympathized with them.

According to Uncle Si, an old villager, the reality was that there was little intra-village stratification in Ku Village. The landlord of Ku Village did not own very extensive landholding as government mentioned. Some only owned small pieces of land and had to work most of their lands themselves with the aid of hired help. Uncle Si told me that some villagers took advantage of land reform to make reprisals.<sup>5</sup>

The land reform involved of personal resentment. Because my father lived in Indonesia, they said he was capitalist and planned to label me as the "black five categories" (hei wulei). But as my brother was a Communist party member and official in Shantou, in the end, they did not dare to bother me.

The land reform seems to refute the myth of solidarity that its existence is intuitive in rural community. Uncle Si's wife clearly stated that the same surname and lineage was meaningless to them.<sup>6</sup> She said:

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announced the *Law of Land Reform of Chinese People Republic* [zhonghua renmin gongheguo tudi gaigefa].

<sup>5</sup>. Although state controls the power of policy formulation, it cannot control the operation process and the outcome of policy. This also explains why communist government so much emphasis on ideology control and political campaigns.

<sup>6</sup>. Most social scientists believe that the common clan and lineage will create the sense of identity and solidarity among the villagers (Huang, 1990; Shue, 1988; Whyte and Parish, 1978). But the empirical data tells me that there is absence of anything one would call "community solidarity" among the villagers in Ku Villager. I agree with Chiu (1992) that social connection or solidarity which constitute complicated relationships are extremely dynamic and fluid. It is not something autonomous and given. I state this point here because



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*When there are interest conflicts between the villagers, everyone is for himself*

So although they sympathized with the fate of "landlord", most villagers accepted the land redistribution and supported the land reform at that time because redistribution of land was a benefit to them, at least it was no harm to them.

The land reform gave each family in the village a class label - "rich peasant", "upper middle peasant", "middle peasant", "poor peasant" - according to their quantity of landholding and household property. No one in the village can provide the real number of different class for me. The villagers only told me that there were less than five households labelled as "rich peasants". Almost all the Kus were the "poor peasants". The class labelling reconstitutes the class structure in rural China, which determines how much "political capital" the villagers owned. This political capital can be translated into power and can influence the life-chance of the villagers, and determine the power relationship between the villagers and their leaders. A villager, about 30 to 40 years old (I do not know his name) expressed his feeling of class labelling,

*Because my father was the staff of Guomindang, our family was labelled as the "five black categories" (wulei fenzi). Our labour were only*

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solidarity is the essential concept in the study of peasant resistance and power. Solidarity is considered as an important factor to organize the political opposition of peasants.



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*counted in half, even though we worked harder than others, we still bore in hunger. We could not raise our head everyday.*

According to villagers, Chungshen (the party secretary of Xiaohuang) can become the secretary because her household is the "poor peasant".

The villagers became self-cultivators after land reforms. Instead of sending payments to landlords, they now paid taxes to the state. In other words, the state became the new big landlord. For Chinese peasants, state extraction and state power penetration directly into the village was the first time in centuries. Land reform represented the first step in the massive penetration of state power into their lives.

### *B. Collectivization*

After the land reform, the so called "local landlord gentry" was destroyed in Ku Village, and in its place came the extension of the state apparatus -- *Songnan xiang* government. The *xiang* government reflects the major interest of the state in the rural areas. It became the state's main instrument for handling the villages.

Like the other villages of rural China, Ku Village experienced sudden and great transformation in the mid-1950s. It began in the form of mutual-aid team, then in the form of early stage collective and higher stage collective, and ended in the organization of People's Commune. To guarantee the supply of agriculture, the



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"three-fixed policy" -- unified purchase quota (*tonggou*), unified sale quota (*tongxiao*) and unified production quota (*dingchan*) -- were carried out in the village.<sup>7</sup> The introduction of Commune system basically ended the collectivization movement, and the commune system founded the basic political and economic administrative system prior to rural reform in the early 1980s.

A commune is divided into a number of production brigades, which are further sub-divided into production teams. In Mei county, there are 32 communes. In Songnan commune, there are 13 production brigades. Ku Village is divided into two production teams under the jurisdiction of Xiaohuang brigade.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>. It aimed to intensify its exploitation and control of the rural society. To extract more from rural society, agricultural output had to increase. Land reform had given the peasants land, but did not lead to an improvement of the over-all agricultural situation, and government could not easily extract the surplus from village. It was because grain production was overwhelmingly in the hands of rich, middle, and poor peasants. Peasant producers still controlled their means of production, production process, and the allocation of grain between on-farm consumption and market sales. For the economic consideration, communist government speeded up the pace of cooperation. Mao believed that collectivization seemed to be the answer to the problem of increased need for agricultural surplus (Mao, 1975).

<sup>8</sup>. The *production team* is the basic production and accounting unit which owns the land and is responsible for all the decisions involving the deployment of available manpower, managing production and distributing the income generated by the production team. In theory, the overall planning of production is subject to certain guidelines such as quotas for grain and basic commodities which must be sold to the state at fixed prices, and the quotas for other agricultural products such as fruit vegetables, fish or meat. In practice, Brother Ming, a former vice brigade party secretary, said that the production team has some flexibility or discretion in meeting different quotas or exceeding certain quotas. The production team has substantial autonomy in making investment decisions involving its own manpower and saving such as organizing the production, resource arrangement.

The *production brigade* co-ordinates the annual production plans of the teams on the basis of quotas assigned by the commune and allocates certain agricultural inputs such as fertilizer and pumps. But its more important functions are to undertake investment and development activities. In addition, it provides certain social services like primary schools, health clinics, entertainment



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All the peasants were organized into the collective agricultural organization. The collective replaced the family as the unit of production and accounting. Their life was different from that of pre-1949. Simply speaking, they could not choose which crops to plant, when to harvest, who should work where, how much to spend on fertilizer, what was the price of the products and so on. The lifestyle was standardized and no one could choose their livelihood.

According to different villagers' recollections, every morning, through the broadcasting networks, the team leader awakened the peasants, then they met the villagers under the tree or at the village entrance. The day's work was assigned at that time. Occasionally, the morning political

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activities. Brigades may also organize credit co-operatives and militia units. The brigade also serves as the seat of the party branch and is the lowest level at which the party operates through direct contact with the rural population.

The *commune* functions to co-ordinate, supervise and guide all these activities of production teams and production brigades. It undertakes larger projects requiring a considerable workforce or substantial financial resources such as large water conservancy projects or rural roads and industrial units. In addition, it provides supplementary social services, particularly secondary education and hospital facilities. The main political function of the commune is to supervise and implement the political and administrative policies of the state and to strengthen the ideological and political basis of the rural society. The communes performs certain other functions, such as military training, control of the movement of population and the collection of state taxes. While in its political role the commune is responsible for implementing government policy at the local level, its economic role is to provide leadership guidance, and assistance for agricultural and rural development through production planning, provision of essential inputs, the diversification of the rural economy and provision of certain social services. In short, the People's Commune is a composite unit of local government that encompass the whole range of economic, social administrative and political functions for the rural community.

My account of the content and function of commune system is brief, interested readers may consult more detailed descriptions in Parish and Whyte's *Village and Family in Contemporary China* and Aziz's *Rural Development: Learning from China and elsewhere*.



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lessons were carried out at that time. The team leader blew his whistle to signal the start of the workaday.

Villagers' daily income were calculated into work points (*gongfen*). The calculation of work points was different in the slack season (*nongxian*) and the busy season (*nongmang*). According to the former vice-party secretary of Xiaohuang, Brother Ming, in the slack season, a villager who contributed labor to the collective could receive 8 working points. In busy and harvest time, a villager could receive 10 working points per day. Ten working points were equal to 0.4 dollar. Not all the villagers could earn the full work points because the labour was divided into full labour, semi labour (elder and young), and non-labour. In a collective, the grain, oil and vegetables and other rations were distributed to the peasant household. The amount of ration was based on the labour of that household. If the peasant household had more labour, their life may be better.

At the end of year, the income of production team was divided among the villagers based on villagers' work points. Brother Ming told me that the cash value of work points was diverse in different brigades. Some brigades' cash value of working point were even lower than 0.4 dollar. If the villager's cash value could cover the cost of rations at the end of the year, the excess cash value was paid in money to the villagers. Otherwise, the villager had to pay to the collective. Uncle Qiang, an old



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villager, told me that many villagers owed money to the collective at the end of year.

The Kus really did not understand why the policy of Communist government often changed. Uncle Xiang expressed his feeling as follows:

*We don't know what happened. The government always says the new policy is benefit and good for us. Ah! No matter good or bad, they have gun, we have no choice.*

In reality, the villagers were not willing to join into collective production. They did not want to give back their land and turn over their private property such as production tool and so forth to collective, especially to the relatively rich households. The villagers thought that they were cheated by Communist Party. Granduncle WenDe, an old villager, stayed in Singapore before 1949. When he heard that land was divided by Communist Party, he came back to Ku Village. But the land reform only made the villager happy for a short period. In the collectivization, the Kus lost all their property. To them, land is very important. They hated any government who occupied their land. Granduncle WenDe told me:

*Don't believe the Communist Party. They often change their policy. I think I wouldn't have come back to Xiaohuang if they didn't tell me the lie.*

The Kus could not refuse to join into collective because the cadres would visit and persuade them everyday. The other villagers who had joined into collective, would also



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discriminate against them and criticize them in the mass meetings.

In short, full collectivization means that all the property became public and the state reasserted its control over the land. Such an all-village cooperative made possible the development of a planned all-village economy, particularly for the basic grains. After the collectivization, the state became much more than just a tax collector in rural society. It planned for and controlled rural commerce, and exercised complete power over household economic decision making. Of course, there are considerable variations in the internal arrangement that have evolved in various communes. But according to the former and present cadres of Ku Village, the formal arrangement and structure of commune, production brigade, and production team of Ku Village is similar to the general situation.

### **III. Socialist Clientelism in Ku Village**

From land reform to collectivization, the communist government fundamentally transformed the rural society. The traditional organizations had been replaced by the new village government and the party had substituted the gentry as the dominant elite in the rural regions. This implied



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that state power now stretched down to the administrative village.<sup>9</sup>

In the village, the village cadres implemented the state policy, transmitted the state order and organized the production. They acted as the brokerage between the state and rural society. As their power were offered by the government, they basically represented the ideology of government in the village. In socialist system, the cadres obtained their power through the distribution of party controlled goods. They controlled the essential goods including food, work, and income opportunities and so on. The villager in socialist system depended on those political leader for a wide range of goods in Mao China.

#### *A. The Power of Local Cadres in Ku Village*

In the formal and informal interviews with the villagers and local cadres (former and present), they provided me an image of the local cadres as powerful in controlling the activities of the villagers in collective

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<sup>9</sup>. Before 1949, the traditional gentry acted as the protective brokerage who linked the state and rural society. The removal of middleman between state and village let the crucial point of intersection between state power and the village community occur at the level of the villager or production team. State power directly penetrated into all aspects of the village. As Huang states: "the old triangular relationship between state, gentry or landlord, and peasants was replaced by the new bipolar relationship between state and peasants" (Huang, 1990:171).



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agriculture. This was due to their ability to control the subsistence and livelihood of the peasants.<sup>10</sup>

The Xiaohuang brigade party secretary, Chunsheng, clearly stated that they had strong power in collective era. She said that:

*In collective era, when we said 'yes', no villagers dared to say 'no'. It was because the villager begged for everything from us.*

The "everything" include the grain, work distribution, private plots, welfare, sidelines and so on. After collectivization, participation in collective labor was the only means of obtaining grain. Although the black market was always existed, as its activities were illegal, the supply was unstable and the price was higher. If the villagers exited from the collective, their subsistence would reach a crisis.

Firstly, most important, the local cadres controlled the income of the peasants in collective. They had the power to determine the work schedule and assigned the work to the team members. As the work-point value and difficulty was different in various tasks, in order to obtain the high work-point value and easy tasks, the villagers tried to keep a good personal relationship with the cadres. According to Brother Ming, some jobs such as

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<sup>10</sup>. As Oi's states that "teams leader derive authority from their ability to influence the distribution of rewards in collective agriculture. The degree to which they can capitalize on their official positions varies, but unscrupulous team leader have the potential and the power base to become "local emperors" (*tu huangdi*) in China's countryside" (Oi, 1989).



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carrying the stones, cutting the trees and so on, were worth few work points and were both difficult and time-consuming. This job was often assigned to one they termed as "mischievous element" (*tiaopi fenzi*). In contrast, some prestige jobs, such as tractor driving or herding the cattle, which required little energy but paid high work points, were often assigned to the one had good relations with the cadres. Brother Ming said:

*We often assigned the good job to our family members, close relatives or those who had good relationships with us. It is just the way of the world (renzhi changqing).*

Secondly, the village not only controlled the collective income, but also controlled the private income of the village. Although the land were given over to collective, the failure of Great Leap, the peasant households of Ku Village were still allow to keep a little private plot (*ziliu di*). So everyday, after contributing the labour to collective, the villagers carried out some sideline activities on their private plot. However, they still could not plant anything they wanted on the private plots, especially in the campaign of "cut the tail of capitalism" (*ge zibenzhuyi weiba*). Uncle Si told me,

*At that time, everyone had not enough food to eat. I had five children. Only depending on the ration was impossible to live. So I decided to plant some sweet potato and sold in open market. But the leader did not allow it and said that it was walking on the road of capitalism (zou ziben zuyi daolu).*



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Under the ideology of "a grain must be taken as the key link in agriculture" (*yiliang weigan*), many sideline activities were banned.

Apart from the power of work allocation, the local cadres also controlled the job opportunity outside agriculture. Brother Ming told me that sometimes the factories in city would employ the contract labor. The contract labour jobs in urban areas were particularly attractive because they provided the opportunity for peasants moving to city even temporarily. Sometimes, the peasants would become part of the permanent urban population if they could establish a good network in city when they were working in contract jobs. The competition for these prestige jobs was keen as there was little job opportunity in Xiaohuang. So the villagers who had no personal relationship with the cadres would not be able to obtain the opportunity. The brigade leader and team leader played an important role in selecting the workers. The recommendation of the team leader was usually a precondition.

Brother Ming told me that the decision making was carried by voting in the brigade meeting. One time, the brother of the Xiaohuang brigade party secretary (Chunsheng's brother) was recommended to work in Mei county. In the meeting, there were seven cadres. Three voted for and the other three voted against the



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recommendation. Brother Ming's voting was critical to influence the result. Brother Ming said:

*My vote was very important. If I voted against, her brother would lose the chance to work in city. But her brother was my good classmate in secondary school, and I didn't want to have conflict with Chunsheng. So I voted for him in the meeting. Now he became the cadre in County's Agriculture Committee.*

In addition, the village leader also allocated welfare like other team resources. The "economically distressed household" (*kunan hu*) would be particularly dependent on their local leader. They had to approach the team leader, told him their problems and ask for a loan or subsidy. Because they could not afford the education fee of their children, they had to ask the leader issuing the certificate to remit the school fee. A villager, Uncle Qiang, told me that he "felt himself like a beggar" when he approached the cadres. For the survival and education of his children, he could only beg for the aid from the team leader. Officially, though the team leader needed higher approval before the loan could be granted, loan application never reached the higher levels for approval without the team leader's recommendation.

Furthermore, the local cadres also controlled the migration of the peasants through the household registration system. In Mao's China, both urban and rural population had no freedom of internal migration from one region to another. The people had to get the certificate (*zhengming*) of permission sealed by the local government.



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Because the chop was held in the hand of local cadres and the certificate was issued by them, in order to make things convenient, the villagers always tried their best to keep good relations with local cadres. Uncle Wu told me that he had to bring some gifts to cadres of the brigade after he visited his brother in Shantou. The "chop" power of local cadres also influenced different aspects of peasant life such as marriage, birth and so on. The marriage and birth certificate were also sealed by the local cadres. Liqing and Brother Ming's marriage had been intervened by brigade. Since Liqing's family was labelled as "black five categories", the brigade asked Brother Ming to consider the marriage carefully. They said that Liqing would influence Ming's prospects. But Ming insisted to marry Liqing. In the end, he had to resign his post in brigade and joined the army.

Due to severe food shortage and lacking other alternatives, the peasants economically had to depend on the collective for subsistence. Personally, they had to depend on their village leader for more benefits. The team leader prominently controlled the peasants' basic means of subsistence. Therefore, the team leader could exercise their power to control the action of peasants, and mobilize them to participate into the public affairs such as irrigation projects. The local cadres were also easy to fulfil the target of state policy such as birth control. For obtaining the support from the villagers, the village



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cadres often exchanged the benefit such as work point, welfare services and outside job opportunity for the loyalty and support from the villagers. This dependent relationship forms the clientelist politics in rural China. The peasants are clients to their team leaders. Their team leaders are clients to brigades, and brigades are clients to communes. It constitutes a hierarchical patron-client relationship.

#### *B. The Dilemma of Local Cadres*

According to Brother Ming, under the communes and the brigades, clear distinction was always made between the cadres who ate "state rice" (*chi guojia fan*) and those who ate "collective rice" (*chi jiti fan*). All the commune cadres ate "state rice". But in brigade, only part of cadres ate "state rice". The cadres who ate "collective rice" had to participate into daily production. At the team level, all the cadres ate "collective rice". Their income were also counted into work points and were correlated to the collective income.

Regardless whether the cadres ate "collective rice" or "state rice", their authority was appointed and paid for by the government. Placing the local leaders on the position of state bureaucracy had decisively broken their dependence on the village. The village cadres in Ku Village really lacked the incentive to serve the village by protecting it against the state although they came from Ku Village.



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To the villagers, the village cadres were state agents who represented the state and implemented the state policy. Although the local cadres came from the village, the villager told me that cadres did not take care of the interest of village like the traditional gentry or brokerage. The interest of state always overrides that of kin and village. As Baba stated,

*Kin? Relative? So what? They [local cadres] never take care of our interest. They only serve for themselves.*

In most situations, when the state policies contradicted to the local interest, they would comply with the state policy because their positional advantage helped them avoid the harmful influence of state policy. They often resisted the state policies only for self-interest, but not for the villagers'. Their positional advantage helped them to further own interest and practice favouritism. Brother Ming told me that there were different strategies the local cadres employed to search for self-interest. For example, the accountant often counted more grain on his family's quota. The register staff often cheated in the working point register. The store keeper sometimes stole the grain and fertilizer, and sold in black market.

To the village cadres, although the managerial and distributive power was concentrated in the hands of the local leaders, there were limitations on their power as they were also client to upper government. The local



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cadres complained that their opinion was difficult to pass from down to top as they only had power to transmit and implement the quotas, target, and development plan from above. Chunsheng, told me:

*We have no choice. If we cannot fulfil the task and duties, we will be subject to sanction and be criticized by the leader of the higher level. If we failed to meet quota, we also feel losing face (dui lian).*

She complained that the higher level often ignored the reality of local as they did not know what was going on at the lower level. The policies were often unrealistic and unpractical. She told me that the local always had to respond to national trend. For example, when the state advocated planting the cotton, the commune compelled the brigade to follow the policy. But they argued that cotton planting was impossible in Ku Village because the climate and soil was not suitable for planting. But fixed quotas made resistance impossible because the local cadres heavily depended on the state for privilege and legitimacy. The team leader depended on the brigade for his office and right to distribute the goods available within team, and thus ultimately for his power.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, the relationship between peasants and local cadres is not a one-side dependency. The local cadres also depend on villager to a minimal extent. Although local

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<sup>11</sup>. As Oi states, "if the upper level decide to reduce agricultural inputs, cut the team budget, demand higher grain sales, and lower grain rations, the team leader, as a subordinate, has no choice but to carry out such directives" (Oi, 1989:145).



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cadres exercise their power to implement state policy, the success of the policy depends on the cooperation of the villagers. If the villagers do not cooperate with them, the local cadres will fail to meet the task of state. The local cadres also clearly know that if they are too harsh to their villagers, the villagers will resort to force. So Chunsheng explained that although they had different means such as using the threat of coercion to enforce policy on the villagers, they still tried to keep good relations with the villagers. The frequent political campaigns also provided the opportunity for the villagers to fight against their local cadres. During the campaign, the villagers could expose the wrong thing of the local cadres to the work team that came from upper government. To protect their position, the local cadres would also try to obtain the support from the masses.

In this sense, the local leaders can be described as both a patron and a client. The local leaders themselves depend on both the state and their villagers. So this kind patron-client relationship is not a simple one-sided dependency and the clientelist relationship is quite unstable.

#### *C. Weapons of the Peasants*

In the villager's view, the collective was like a concentration camp. In the collective, the peasants lost freedom to make decisions on what to produce, how to



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produce, and where to sell. They only received the income depending on their labour contribution. They chose how much to work, not based on their relative preference for leisure and goods, but on whether or not to work at all. Everyone at the time felt hunger. The villagers did not understand why they were still very poor, why the poverty and inequality were still prevalent in rural China. They thought the Communist Government broke her promise of equality and riches. They said that "we will only trust the money in our pocket", and they would not trust the communist government any more. The villagers told me a joke in the campaign of "recalling past suffering and think over the source of present happiness" (*yiku sitian*).

*In the campaign of "recalling past suffering and think over the source of present happiness", an old women was asked to tell of her suffering in the "old society" (jiu shehui).<sup>12</sup> But when she told about the Yuan Shi-kai era, she could not help saying that people was full in Yuan era, but hungry nowadays. So the old women said that Yuan era was the new society, but Mao era was the "old society". In the end, the old women was criticized as "anti-revolutionary".*

The Communist Government lost her legitimacy after the Great Leap because the government broke her promise of equality and riches to peasants. With the poverty of rural society, the inequality between urban and rural was rife in Mao China. In the recollections of the villagers, we can find their disappointment. In the village, I often heard:

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<sup>12</sup>. There is symbolic meaning in the word "old" and "new". "Old" implies hunger, poverty, unhappiness and vice versa.



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*We were very poor at that time [Mao's China]. We had no perfect clothes. All my clothes were tattered.*

*We had no coins in our pockets.*

*We had not enough food [rice] to eat. So most villager had to eat the banana leaf, grass root, even chaff and wild herbs now eaten by pigs. Many villagers' belly became bloated.*

To the villagers, it was a terrible dream in Mao's China. They could never forget the "hunger".

Although the peasants suffered a lot in Mao's era, under the condition of strict control of state bureaucracy, monopoly of resource, closure of market and other life chance alternatives, peasant seems to be powerless to resist state policy. In Ku Village, according to Uncle Si, there were seldom direct confrontation with authority because the villagers were afraid of the terrorist means of government. He said:

*Because they had guns, if we resisted the government, all the things would be taken away and we would be put into prison.*

The revolutionary terror of land reform was still fresh in the minds of the rural population. No peasant wished to take risk. Although the government advocated using peaceful and persuasive methods to carry out the policy, various forms of compulsion were still used by local cadres. Under the state socialism of Mao, the structural disadvantage constrained the political action of the peasants. Although the structural disadvantages constrained the political action of the villagers, we cannot deny that there were still narrow species of power



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they could employ to make the lowest magnitude of influence in Mao China. It is reported that there was sporadic resistance to collectivization in rural China. It appeared to have mainly taken the form of passive non-compliance, withdrawal of effort, slaughter of farm animals and so on. This kind of resistance is what James, C. Scott called the "weapon of the weak" -- everyday forms of resistance.<sup>13</sup>

After the collectivization, the traditional organization had been replaced by the government apparatus. In Ku Village, the peasants were in no way organized by themselves. Due to the limited space of opposition, everyday forms of resistance became the available alternative because they required little or no coordination or planning. They often represented a form of individual self-help, and they typically avoided any direct, symbolic confrontation with authority. The purpose of these forms of resistance was to avoid notice and detection.

In Ku Village, the villagers often employed the way of passive resistance. They often **took small effort** in collective production because the income was not positively

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<sup>13</sup>. According to Scott's viewpoint, everyday forms of resistance are so common in state-socialist forms of agriculture because such system allow little else in the way of opposition. Under state socialism, "Controlling directly the means of coercion, the state typically foreclose open protest, except in utter desperation, and the formal bodies that purport to represent the interest of agriculturist are, as often as not, transmission belts for instructions from the authorities" (Scott, 1989:15).

The ordinary weapons of relatively powerless group include such as foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, feigned ignorance, desertion, pilfering, smuggling, poaching, slander, sabotage, surreptitious assault and anonymous threats, and so on.



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related to how much effort they put out, but related to how much time they spent on the collective work. So the villager told me that they often had a long rest in working while the cadres did not pay much attention on them. In summer, they often enjoyed the cool in some shade and chatted with other villagers under the tree. But under the surveillance of the team leader, they pretended to be working hard. This action influenced the productivity of agriculture, and to some extent reflected the discontent of the villagers. Uncle Xiang told me in collective production,

*... we work when the cadres are around, then we relax when they go away. We make sure we always look like we are working hard when the cadres are there. So they have no any excuse to deduct our work points.*

**Dissimulation** was another strategy of the peasants to resist state policy. Feigned sickness was rife in Ku Village. Villagers who wanted extra time for sideline work often went to the team leader and asked for time off and left from their collective duties by saying that "I am ill" (*you bing*). On the general situation, the team leader approved their request by "opening one eye and closing the other".

If the team leader did not approve their request, the villager would **slander** the "unfairness" and "corruption" of the leader. During the political campaign, the villagers exposed the wrong things of the team leader and attacked the cadres in public meetings. According to the villagers,



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if they dared to adopt this defensive strategy, it was significant to protect themselves and their families from discrimination by the cadres. But most peasants were afraid of the vengeance of the cadres because there were many opportunities for the cadres to take revenge such as assigning them heavy work.<sup>14</sup>

**Feigned ignorance** was also a form of resistance. According to Uncle Si's wife, there were political meetings every week or month in Mao era. In most meetings, the cadres read out the policy document or newspaper, and explained the directives from the government of higher level. But the villagers often fell silent and seldom spoke. Some talked among themselves, some slept, and some knitted. They seldom actively listened or responded in a meeting. Even if called upon to speak, they would not express their true feelings in the meeting. If we treat the political meeting as a means of ideological control, the action of the villager may be regarded as anti-control. So we can say that even though the state can exercise the material force directly coercing the action of the peasants, it cannot persuade and control the mind of the villagers.

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<sup>14</sup>. The situation was similar in Chen Village, the interviewee of Chen village stated: "Most of the mass were afraid. The cadres were like emperors: brigade emperors and team emperors. If you complained about them, they might want to take revenge, something very frightful. Because a peasant has no way of leaving a village. A cadres's revenge could take the form of assigning them heavy work for years to come" (Chan, Madsen & Unger, 1992:47-48).



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Moreover, as Kelliher states, one essential asset of peasants is their initial control over the harvest (Kelliher, 1992). The strategic position of peasants forced the local cadres to consider their interest to some extent because the local cadres need the co-operation of peasants to fulfil the quota and target of state policy. Kelliher states that:

*Peasants plant the crops, and their hands are the first to touch the harvest. State socialism does nothing to alter this fundamental premise of peasant political life.... The State needs the farm product to feed the cities, to earn foreign exchange, to accumulate capitals, and to supply industry with raw material (Kelliher, 1992:26).*

Therefore, **the sluggishness and the shoddy work** of the villagers will greatly influence the agricultural productivity of state. But I have no desire to gainsay that this form of resistance will also influence the livelihood of the peasant because their income will be directly related to the income of the team and collective.

Regardless of the limitation of peasants resistance under Mao, we understand that power is not just conceived as a property or possession of a dominant class or state. The subordinate groups can still employ the "weapon of the weak" to resist the dominate group and struggle for their interest, even in the structural disadvantage.

### V. Conclusion

*When one thinks of monolithic state, few countries leap faster to mind than Maoist China. Since 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and*



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*its state machine reached out to control more and more aspects of China's economy, polity, and society. At no time in the past 350 years has the state exercised as much power over the lives of its citizens (Zweig, 1989:151).*

It is a view widely shared by scholars that before the rule of communist government, the state was only concerned with the maintenance of order and the collection of taxes. The agrarian economy is chiefly an object of taxation, and the peasant is chiefly a source of tax revenue. Aside from tax collection, neither state interferes much with agriculture and peasant life (Huang, 1990; Schurmann, 1968; Zweig, 1989). During most of Chinese history, the state let society organize itself. Villages develop various forms of cooperation based on kinship, work, religion, and other ties. The state also uses these local organizations for its own interests which are

*maintenance of control through the exercise of self-defense and judicial functions; and the facilitation of exploitation through the collection of revenues, the registration of population, and the execution of public works (Schurmann, 1968:407).<sup>15</sup>*

The scholars of Chinese study widely share the opinion that in Chinese administrative history, formal state administration did not reach below the level of the county

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<sup>15</sup>. The *lija* system of the Ming was an essentially civil form of village organization which grounded villagers into blocks of households. The *baoja* system of the Qing, which similarly grouped households, was essentially a military organization. However, in general, both systems were for the maintenance of order, the collection of taxes, and registration of population. They served the function of control and exploitation of state. In traditional villages, local elites afforded the task of tax collection and public affair such as taking charge of religious ritual, managing irrigation and so on.



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(*xian*).<sup>16</sup> It is because *yamen*, the representative of state, was set up in the *xian*. The *yamen* office symbolizes the relationship between state and society. There the leaders of civil society and the officer of government meet.

The new revolutionary state, however, was more ambitious than simply to extract surplus from the countryside. The land reform introduced by Chinese Communist was to destroy the traditional elite, the official-landlord gentry, and give land to the peasants (Schurmann, 1968). The collectivization intended to weaken the rich peasants, integrate their property into the collective and create all village collective economy based on the natural village. More important, in order to produce food for its growing population and provide savings for industrialization, fundamental transformation of the traditional village became necessary. To do so, the state has not only to extend its vertical reach down to the village, but also to expand the horizontal scope of its powers, to encompass especially rural economic life (Schurmann, 1968; Huang, 1990; Shue, 1988). The communist party stretches down to the production brigade, where the party branch committee (*dangzhi bu*) takes over for the state. The party branch committee secretary becomes the post-revolutionary equivalent of the old administrative

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<sup>16</sup>. The *xian* was an administrative unit consisting of a commercial town surrounded by an agricultural region linked by economics, political, military, social and cultural ties.



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village head. In the commune system, real power rests with the party. The party makes the decisions in regard to all major activities of the *xiang* and commune. In addition, the party represents the ideology of central government and the link between the leadership and the masses. It has become the integrating element of the new society.<sup>17</sup>

Collectivization seems to be the only appropriate way to guarantee quick accumulation because peasants working in the collective enable the government to extract more from rural society. It ensures the peasant does not secretly harvest and sequester grain. Like working in the factory, peasants will be brought together to labour under the eyes of watchful oversees. The triumph of the communist government is not only a monopoly of the resources [land] of production, but an absolute prohibition against the private market. In the collective, peasant lost their control on resources and means of production, their labour process, their products and interaction with market. Participation in collective production became the only source of subsistence. So the peasants economically depend on their production. As the local cadres derive authority from their ability to monopolize the resource distribution and influence the life chance of peasants, personally, the villagers depend on the local cadres for more benefits. For the loyalty and support from the peasants, the local

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<sup>17</sup>. As Huang states, what distinguished the revolutionary state from earlier ones is the Party organization paralleled the formal apparatus of government at every level.



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cadres exchange the resources with the villagers. So the structure of socialist system determines the patron-client relation in rural China.

However, the role of patron in socialist society is somewhat different to the traditional one. Many scholars have mentioned the dilemma of local cadres in rural China (Shue, 1988; Zweig, 1989; Huang, 1990; Oi, 1989). As Zweig states,

*The cadres monitored local activities and used their party authority to dominate village politics. They were also the major agents of state interests in the countryside. However, team and brigade officials' positions in local society also force them to consider the interests of their fellow villagers (Zweig, 1989:155).*

There are different cases in Mao's China to show that the cadres act as traditional gentry who often consider the local interest of their fellow villagers. They employ different kinds of strategies such as withholding the truth, misreporting the data and so on to resist state policy.<sup>18</sup>

Although there are some similarities between local cadres and traditional gentry or patron, we cannot confuse

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<sup>18</sup>. Shue's localism emphasizes the ability of local officials to limit central state penetration and control of rural village. She juxtaposes the role of local officials and traditional gentry who often stand for the local interest and bargain with the central authority. She states that: "It seems quite clear that local cadres in horizontally regarding or regional units who stayed in their positions for any length of time inevitably came to identify with and represent the interests of their localities and regions. Their own careers and reputations were, after all, intimately tied to the fates of those areas and regions. The mind set of these local officials was strongly characterized by an inclination to pursue the interests of their own areas against other areas and, when necessary, against the demands of the vertical state apparatus" (Shue, 1988:56).



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the role of local cadres and traditional patron or gentry. As Schurmann points out,

*the gentry's economic power was based on land ownership, its political power was based on its relationships to the state bureaucracy, and its social power was based on its traditional states (Schurmann, 1968:497).*

Moreover, their legitimacy are granted by villagers based on their ability to hold expensive ceremonies, make large religious contribution and give personal loan and donation and so on. But after the movement of the communist government, all these sources of power have vanished. By contrast, the local cadre's power, as Oi states, granted to them by the state, derives from his position in the administrative hierarchy (Oi, 1989). So he has less incentive to protect the interests of the village. When the policy is imposed from government, he often complies with the requirements of the state.

However, the exercise of power is grounded in the challenge-response mechanism of class conflict. Although the government or local cadres control the life-chance and survival of the peasants, we cannot deny that they can employ the everyday forms of resistance to challenge the domination. According to James Scott, resistance is not necessarily the organized and violent political action like Marx mentioned. They require little or no co-ordination and planning. The peasants often employ this form of resistance to express their discontent and protect their self-interest. The unintended consequence of this politics



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is difficult to measure, but the everyday actions of the subordinate group tell us they are not really powerless. Their everyday resistances also tell us that the government's adopting material force can only control their action but cannot persuade their mind.



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### The Ku Village in Transformation (I) -- The Retreat of the State

*Even though we may know why that which happened happened suddenly, we may still be in the dark about why it happened at all.*

-- K. Polanyi, 1957

Like other agrarian societies of China, Ku Village is undergoing transformation. Some social institutions are retained while others are abandoned. One of the obvious changes is the reconstruction of local administrative organization. State power-holders declare the political reform in rural areas as the "decentralization" of power and "limitations" on excessive state interference because according to the Law of 1982, the formal governmental organization returns to the *xian* or *zhen* level. The state's agents at *zhen* or *xian* level no more interfere with the rural economic life, and the villagers are offered autonomy in production and almost all aspects of life (White, 1990; Wang, 1992; Zhong, 1990). Some scholars argue that the communist state increasingly loses its ability to reach rural society based on the evidence that the distortion of policy often occurs at local (Zweig, 1983 & 1984). But some argue that this should not be allowed to mislead us in thinking that the state has retreated from the village. They insist that the party-state still influences the life of the peasant if it wants to do so,



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and the introduction of market forces exposes peasants to less predictable economic conditions in which the central government can intervene more directly (Shue, 1988).

The evidence of Ku Village suggests to us that state has withdrawn from the village after the reconstruction of local administrative organization and the introduction of responsibility system. The intention of this chapter is to map out the macro-institutional change which Ku Village shared with other villages in China, and find out the local response in this change. It will also study the impact of political reform on the power relationship between the rural cadres and villagers in Ku Village. Understanding the macro-institutional change is quite important to understanding the change of the power relationship between the village organs and the local government because no one can deny the institutional constraints on the human agency, especially in socialist state.

### **I. Reconstructing the Rural Administrative Organization**

In Ku Village, the reform of rural political institution was carried out in the early 1980s. As before, the policy was transmitted from Songnan commune to Xiaohuang brigade, and then to the production teams in Ku Village. The villagers only knew the reconstruction of local administrative organization in the mass meeting held by the production team. But according to the villagers, there was not any great reaction among the villagers



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because the government often changed its policy in their eye.<sup>1</sup>

From 1958 until 1982, the lowest level of government used to be the commune. It was the grass roots government below the county level and it functioned as the collective economic and management unit.<sup>2</sup> In 1983, the political and administrative authority of Songnan Communes transferred to Songnan *xiang* or township government, with economic functions transferred to subordinate economic management committee (*jingji guanli weiyuanhui*). It aims to separate the politics and economic, and permits a greater degree of independent management of the rural economy.<sup>3</sup> Under the new local government arrangement, the township people's congress elects the township people's government. Under the township people's government, there are different committees discharging responsibilities in the areas of dispute mediation, public security maintenance, tax

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<sup>1</sup>. Some have commented that it is only the revival of traditional government which does not directly intervene the village below *xian*. Shue (1988) basically takes the opposite standpoint. She believes that the dismantling of collective economy will shake both the organizational skeleton of honeycomb polity and the morality of localism. The leaving solidarity of the village permits the state to penetrate into rural communities and strengthen state's influence on village society.

<sup>2</sup>. The combination of government administrative and economic management (*zhengshi heyi*) created a number of problem. As Wang states, "many of the problems stemmed from the over concentration of decision making powers in the hands of a few commune leaders. Particularly troublesome was the interference of the commune, in its role as governmental administrator, in the activities of the production team" (Wang, 1992:161-162).

<sup>3</sup>. More important, as White states, power is decentralized or redistributed in favour of individual villagers and autonomous villagers's committees (White, 1990).

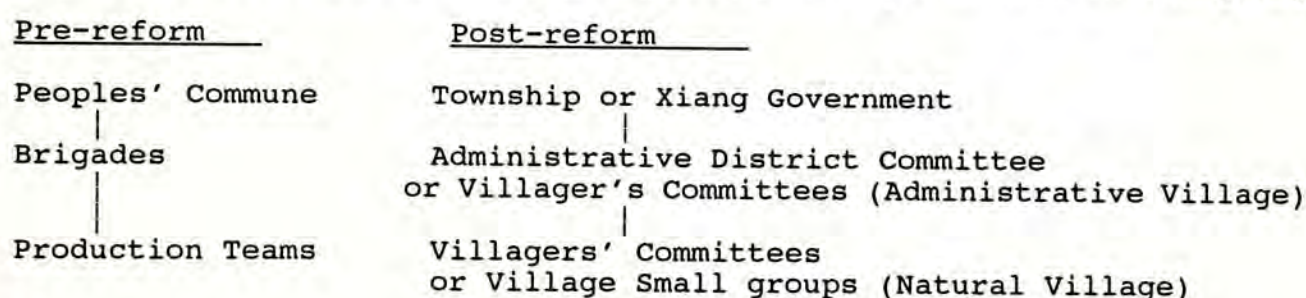


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collection, education, public health, and family planning and so on.

At the same time, Xiaohuang production brigades were converted to administrative villages (*xingzhen cun*) led by villager's committee (*cunmin weiyuanhui*), and production teams in Ku Village were converted to village small groups (*cunxiao zu*). But in 1989, Guangdong government modified the structure of local administrative organizations. The administrative districts committee (*guanli qu weiyuanhui*) replaced the villager's committee at the level of the pre-reform production brigade, while the villager's committee replaced the village small groups which set up in natural village. The new structure of local administrative organization is shown in the following figure.

Figure I. Structure of Local Administrative Organization in Guangdong



According to Article 111 of the 1982 constitution and the "Organic Law Governing Village Committees of the People's Republic of China" in 1987, the law provides a grass roots level of local self-government below the township structure in rural areas. Although the villager's committee undertakes a number of administrative tasks in



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areas such as water conservation, villager's welfare programs, mediation of civil disputes, public order, and rules governing villager's conduct, it is not recognized formally as local government unit. So the relation between the village committee and township government becomes ambiguous. From 1986 to 1987, the NPC's<sup>4</sup> Standing Committee debated questions concerning the relation between the villagers' committees and township government. Finally, according to the law, the role of the villagers' committee is to serve as "a bridge" between the villagers and local township authorities, and the villagers' committees are not a governmental organ but a mass organization. The chairman, vice-chairmen and members of villages' committee are elected by the villagers. Any villagers over age 18 can participate in village conferences to discuss and decide village affair (Zhang & Bai, 1989; Xie, 1991).

The law also summarizes the duties and responsibilities as: people's mediation, public security, public health and other matters in order to manage public affairs (such as road and bridge repairs), provide social services (such as nurseries and homes for the aged, organizing the cultural and recreational activities in their areas), mediate civil disputes, help maintain public order, convey resident's opinion and demands, and make suggestions to the people's government as a channel between

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<sup>4</sup>. NPC is National People's Congress.



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the government and the masses (Zhang & Bai, 1989; Xie, 1991; Wang, 1992).

In sum, the reconstructing the local administrative organization aims to allow peasants to exercise autonomy over their own affairs. Additionally, it provides an opportunity for the 800 million peasants to learn and practice democracy through election of village committee.

### II. Local Response to the Political Reform

To the Kus, the reconstruction of local administrative organization was meaningless to them because the local organizations in Ku Village only changed in name, but not in nature.<sup>5</sup> There is a great distance between the state's goal and the real situation.

As the new constitution states, reorganization is to separate the politics and economies and enhance the efficiency of local government. But in Ku Village, the separation of politics and economy is still not clear. The local cadres still work in the old way. Now in the administrative district committee, there are only three cadres: Chunsheng, the party secretary, is also the party secretary in brigade; Chongshen, the accountant, is also the old cadres in brigade; A Ling, the women's representatives, is a new cadres after rural reform. As many posts have been abolished and many cadres have

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<sup>5</sup>. Like all organizations and politics, there is a disjuncture between leadership intention, organizational behaviour, and the actual results of action (Lampton, 1987).



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resigned, the present cadres have to take over the other duties, whether politics or economy. For example, all three cadres have to take over the duty of family planning. In the Commune era, the infraction of village rule and quarrels between villagers were used to be dealt with by a brigade-level public officer. But now, Chunsheng and Chongshen have to take over the duties of mediating dispute and other different kinds of responsibility. This evidence indicates that there is no separation of politics and economy at the lowest level. At the production team level, without any economic function to perform, the villager's committee no longer needs a full-fledged villager's committee. There is just a village head and a part-time accountant.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, the other goal of rural political reform is to enhance grass-roots democratic practices. According to the constitution, the democratically elected villager's committees have been constitutionally and legislatively mandated. However, the available evidence of my case indicates that political reform has not enhanced grass-roots democracy. The former brigade leader, Uncle Bi, told me that an election was held only once after the law was passed down. Uncle Bi clearly knew the stipulation of the constitution. He explained it to me in detail when I interviewed with him.

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<sup>6</sup>. The part-time accountant only calculates the simple income and output of the public finance of the village twice a year.



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The Xiaohuang administrative district replaced the Xiaohuang brigade. Formally, there are five cadres: party secretary, district (qu) head, accountant, women representative and public security officer. The party secretary is elected by the party members in villages. The other cadres are elected by representatives of villagers' committee. In the villager's committee, there are two cadres. One is the village head and the other is the accountant. These two cadres are elected by the representatives of households. The election of administrative district is carried out 3-5 years, and the election of villagers' committee is carried out 2-3 years. But it is quite common that locality take a negligent attitude toward state policy. When the policy is transmitted to locality, the locality often fulfils the requirement of state in the first time because the policy is tightly implemented by the government of higher level at first. Afterward, the stipulation of state is often ignored by the locality as the control of government is loosened.

Therefore, after some cadres resign, the local government often reassigns the new member to fill in the vacancy. The new cadres, such as ALing, are appointed by the township government. Not all the cadres are satisfied with the election arrangement; the party secretary is not elected by the villagers. Chongshen express his discontent in the interview. He complained the unfair election institution.

*We are elected by the villagers, but they [the party secretary] are elected by less than twenty party members in the village. We have no right to elect and dismiss them no matter how good or bad of their performance. It is the characteristic of Chinese socialism...*

Moreover, the law states that while the villagers' representative congress may dismiss the elected cadres, the village regulations may be promulgated only with the approval of the villagers' representative congress, and the



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expenses needed to run public utilities must be discussed and approved by the congress. However, it is a mere formality. The congress actually does not exist in the village. Villagers are not willing to participate in the representative congress because they think the meeting will waste their time in production. Chunsheng told me:

*Now no mass meeting will be held. The villagers are indifferent to the meetings held by us. We asked them to join the meeting; we had to distribute work points to them.*

Therefore, in Ku Village, the cadres are appointed by the *xiang* government. The villagers have no right to dismiss them. All the decisions are made by the cadres, but not the villager's representatives.

The other goal of rural political reform is also to promote village-level autonomy. The constitution of 1982 clearly creates a division between township government and village level organization. The township government is formally regarded as the lowest organ of state power, and the villagers' committee or administrative district committee is defined as a mass organization of self-management at the grass-roots level.<sup>7</sup> So the role of villagers' committee is to assist local government in administrative work and leadership over production. Their relation with township, as officially defined, is "one

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<sup>7</sup>. According to White's view, "This constitution was intended to turn the villagers' committee into bridge between state and society in rural China and to shift the balance of power between township and village cadres in favour of the village" (White, 1990:54).



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between those who guide and those who are guided" (Zhang & Bai, 1989; Xie, 1991). However, in reality, their relation is one between the leader and those who are led. The village leaders subordinate to township official as before. They seem to have no right to refuse township government's directive and assignment. They are still the extensions of the state into the village and still the mouthpiece of government to introduce the state policy to the villagers. In the interview with Chunsheng, she said:

*The state policy and task are passed down from the township government. We will join the meeting in township government. Then we passed the policy down to village.*

*If we cannot fulfil the task [eg. tax collection and birth control], our salaries will be deducted.*

This implies a continuous obligation of village cadres to take orders from township cadres. The structural reform means no change in the relationship between the township and administrative district committee and villagers' committee. This change in the end is purely symbolic. State policy is transmitted to village progressively through administrative hierarchy as before. When the policy comes to township, all the brigade cadres have a meeting in township government. Then the brigade cadres transmit the policy to the team head. Finally, the team heads hold the mass meeting and propagate the state policy to the villagers. But the village head, Uncle Leng told me:



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*Now we no more hold the mass meeting. No villagers are willing to participate into the meeting even if we pay the work points to them.*

*... we just copy the statement of state policy on a large red paper and then post it in the village.*

However, after the interview, I looked for the poster in village. I could not find the remainder of the posters. I asked a young villager, Brother Xin, if he found the poster put out by the villagers' committee or administrative district committee. He answered me:

*I don't know. It is irrelevant to me. I just care how to make money.*

Although the village administration is no longer officially titled a "brigade" and "production team", old habits die hard and the villagers normally continue to refer to the village organs as the "brigade" and "production team". No villager really understands the content of constitution. They do not care about the reconstruction of the political organization because they say that the communist government often changes the things they made and they have been accustomed to the change.

The reconstruction of administrative organization redefines the role of village organs and the village cadres and their relationships with the state. However, the village organs are still the state's representatives in village. They still play the important function of policy implementation such as tax collection, birth control and so on. Although the state treats the village organs as the



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lower administrative organizations in village, the paradox is that the state does not pay any financial support for village organs to maintain their functions and legitimacy. After the fiscal reform in the mid-1980s, localities become fiscally self-sufficient. It aims to reduce the central state's own fiscal burden, and to provide incentives for local authorities to promote economic development. However, the localities without any enterprises and industries often cannot bear the fund for welfare services and public affairs. As the state does not provide any financial assistance, the village organs fall in the situation of paralysis or semiparalysis. Chunsheng firmly told me that "the local government doesn't provide any coin to us".<sup>8</sup>

### III. Paralysis of Village Organs

The structural reform seems to bring paralysis or semiparalysis to the village organs. The first obvious phenomenon is that the village organs no longer act as bodies which provide services and benefits to their members, and the local cadres no more intervene the daily production of the peasant as the individual households have replaced the collective as the unit of production and accounting. After the "responsibility system" and land

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<sup>8</sup>. People interesting in the detail of the rural political reform can also read J. E. Croll. 1987. "Reform, Local Political Institutions and the Village Economy in China." *Journal of Communist Studies* 3:28-51; J. P. Burn, 1983. "Reforming China's Bureaucracy, 1979-1982." *Asian Survey* 23:692-772.



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redistribution was put into effect, the functions of village organs reached to nearly zero. The remaining ones are: transmitting state policy; taxes collection; and birth control. But there is no guarantee that the village organs can fulfil these tasks smoothly.

Although the institutional arrangement has been redesigned, their job descriptions rewritten, and their working relationship with peasants has changed, the expectation of their party superior and the villagers remain the same. The Kus think that the village organs are still the state's representative in village as before because they implement state policy and transmit the state's orders. When the village organs and its agents cannot fulfil their duty, a crisis occur in their legitimacy. The villagers blame the irresponsible organ and its agents in daily chatting. In Ku Village, I find that in the eye of the villagers, the roles of villagers' committee and administrative district -- especially the villagers' committee -- are not important. They believe that they are irrelevant to the cadres now. The principal of the village primary school, Uncle Xiang, often expressed his discontent to the government and local cadres in the daily chatting with me. One night, when I asked him if they still had to make good relations with the local cadres, he angrily said:

*We have nothing to plea from the local cadres!  
Nothing! Even if we have, we still solve the  
problem by ourselves. Now everyone does anything*



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*for themselves. I plant my Shatian shaddock, they [local cadres] work as their official.*

Uncle Si also said:

*Before, during the period of the collectives, we had to ask for favours for everything. Now we only do the things for ourselves. For most people and most of the time, we don't need the cadres.*

In daily chatting with the villagers, the Kus gossiped among themselves that the cadres were useless. Uncle Xiang said:

*The present government does nothing for the people. For example, the local government can not afford construction of the school. All the funds are donated by the overseas villagers. Don't blame them! Our great communist party is poor; it has no money!*

*They [local cadres] only take the salary, but do nothing.*

Many villagers showed their dissatisfaction toward the present government. A former villager, Liqing, commented about the evaporation of the community structures that existed in her own day. She said the local organization in Mao's era had provided organized activities such as lion dance, film show and so on for the villagers in the important festivals such as the Chinese New Year, Yuan Xiao festivals and so on. The villagers believe that the local government must play the role of coordinator and has responsibility to organize the activities for the villagers. It is quite contradictory to find that the villagers on one hand hate the collective era, but on the



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other hand, they expect the brigade and production team to maintain some functions they accepted.

In the Chinese New Year of 1994, when I came back to Ku Village. I found there was no group festival activities in the village. In the dialogue with Liqing, she looked back at the collective life and compared it to the less cohesive community where she now spent her Chinese New Year holiday each year.

Before, the brigade or production team at festival could organize different kinds of activities such as lion dance and paying for a group's New Year call. Now, instead of such community get-together, people just watch TV and video cassettes, playing cards, gambling in their own homes. Now the villagers have no sense of belonging to the village. The entire sense of community life is weakened, and I regret it deeply. Now I don't like to return to the village in New Year's holiday.

The village organ not only lost its function to provide welfare service to the villagers, but it also lost its function to manage public affairs. For both road paving and construction of the school, most of the needed funds come from the villagers and the donation of overseas villagers, little comes from the team and brigade coffers. There was a event happened in Ku Village that shows that villagers were discontented with the village organs and cadres.

The villagers are very dissatisfied with road paving between the Xiaohuang and Songkou town. They think that it is the local government's responsibility to pave the way for villagers. However, the fund in the end was shared by the villagers. Uncle Si told me that in 1992, the villagers paid 20 yuan per person. The villagers hoped the administrative district



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committee could make good use of their money in the transportation improvement. However, the result was not satisfactory because the road became muddy and rugged after a rain.

One day in the village, when I went to a fair in Songkou town with the villagers, it had rained the day before. So the road became muddy and rugged. When the motorcycle and vehicles passed, the people were easily spattered with mud. Tractors also easily got stuck in the mud. Brother Xin just experienced that day.

The villagers were filled with anger because of the muddy road. They cursed the cadres of administrative district committee and also swore at the transportation Department. I tried to find out the reality of this event. One of my relatives, Uncle Bing, told me the reality when I visited him in Songkou Town.<sup>9</sup> The project of paving the way was contracted out to a private building team by administrative district committee. But the building team only got it done in a slapdash manner. When the officer of the transportation department came to check the quality of the road, the building team invited the officer to have a meal in a restaurant. As a result, the officers of the transportation department never checked the quality of the paved road. But the newspaper declared that the way had been paved. This event aroused villagers' discontent with the village organ, not only due to its incapability to afford the paving fund, but also their dereliction of duty. This event taught the villagers that the village organ was incapable in public affairs. This event also enhanced the difficulty of village organs to collect fees for public affairs.

Furthermore, the villagers are discontented with the heavy burden of education. Theoretically, schooling is compulsory and free, but in reality it is not. Each student has been required to pay a deposit of 50 yuan per primary student and 100 yuan per secondary student. The tuition fee of the secondary student also increased from 19 yuan to 185 yuan. If the students do not pay the deposit,

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<sup>9</sup>. He is a staff in the transportation department, so he knows the reality well.



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they will not be allowed to enter school. The villagers called it "high priced education" (*gaojia shu*). Uncle Nianhua heaved a sigh when I talked with him about the education in village. He said:

*... Nowadays, you have money, you can enter any school you wanted. Songkou secondary school is a famous school in Mei county. Before, only the good students can enter this school. But now if you can pay 1,800 yuan, even if your score is below the score line (*fenshu xian*), you still can enter Songkou secondary school.*

Although the villagers can afford the various school fees such as book charges, snack fees, renovation fees and so on, they grumble about the heavy burden. They question the obligation of government. In the eye of villagers, the government always intends to extract the money from them by every possible means. Uncle Xiang expressed his discontent when I was chatting at his home.

*Government did not afford any obligation nowadays, but always want to steal the money from our pocket. Do you know in the eye of 'Uncle Peasants' (*nongmin bobo*), a coin is very large? They distinguish clearly that coin of mine and yours. It is difficult to get a coin from uncle peasants' pocket.*

Moreover, the village organ fails to fulfil its responsibility of education. For the school construction and repairs, the local government does not afford the needed funds any more. Most of the funds come from the villagers' families and donations from overseas villagers. The Songxi village primary school was built by the overseas villagers. The funds for extension and repairing all come from the donations of overseas villagers. The cadres and



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Uncle Jiang have asked me for a donation for the school repairing fund.

The paralysis of village organs is also reflected in the practice of hanging out shingles. After decollectivization, private property has been returned to the villagers. The villagers' house which the brigade previously occupied as their office have been returned to the villagers. So now the administrative district committee of Xiaohuang has not any formal office. Where to hang out the shingle becomes the problem for the cadres. At first, the cadres planned to borrow the Aged House (the recreation centre of the aged) as their temporary office and hang out the shingle on the door of Aged House. The old villagers refused the request of the cadres. Granduncle De said:

*The Aged House is built with the donations of overseas Chinese, but not the local government. It is unreasonable for them to occupy the place as their office. If they want to hold the meeting here, they must just come into the Aged House after they become 60 years old.*

When I mentioned this event with Chunsheng, she was very angry and said:

*...they said we must join the Aged House, and if not, they will not allow us to have meetings there. Now, no one respects us and understands our job. We only serve for them, but they treat us as the enemy.*

Now the shingles of administrative district committee are hung out on the door of the store. I have visited the store with ALing. The store is far from the village. The



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villagers' committee also has no formal office. According to the cadres and villagers, the office has not any real function to them because the cadres can have the meeting at any one cadres' home, and the villagers can visit cadres' home. But it symbolizes the existence of the local government.

The reforms have placed new burdens on the village cadres. Today they retain an obligation to enforce unpopular state directives without the back-up of authority and lack of the control mechanism (resource control) as before. The difficulty of the task reduces the incentives for cadres. Chunsheng clearly stated that if higher level officials permitted her to retire, she would not stay on the repugnant post any longer. She always complained about the work load or the unfair treatment that they had encountered. On the one hand, they must fulfil all tasks assigned by the state and withdraw pressure from their superiors; at the same time, they have to take peasants' feeling into consideration and face the pressure from the peasants. So now they often fall into a very awkward situation.

Compared with the brigade leader, the role of the prior team leader has almost totally eroded. The reforms plainly reduce the duties and powers of the team head. The team heads are not called on to coordinate and hand out works assignment as each household now work in their own field. The remaining task of the team leader under reform



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is only to transmit the order and message, and contract out the public asset to the villager and collect the contracted fee. The tasks such as collecting the grain quotas and disbursing agricultural supplies have been done by the Administrative District. So now it has become difficult to persuade anyone to become a team leader. In Ku Village, no one is willing to take the post. Uncle Leng at first also refused to take the post of village head. After the persuasion of Administrative District cadres, Uncle Leng promised to return to the post temporarily.

The local cadres lack incentive to do the task well as they obtain little benefit. According to Brother Ming, in order to strengthen village leadership, collective subsidies for cadres at village and administrative district level were reintroduced beginning in 1983.<sup>10</sup> Their salary was very unattractive. The village cadres were dissatisfied with their treatment compared with the village cadres of Pearl River Delta. Uncle Leng resentfully said:

*They [the villager cadres of Pearl River Delta] get several thousands per month, but what about me? I only get 36 yuan per month. What a great difference! I hear the people say that they who sell a piece of land to foreign investors can earn a large amount of money. We are so poor. The villagers do not respect us any more.*

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<sup>10</sup>. The level of income for individual cadres vary by post and are linked to the income level of the villages. Cadres in relatively prosperous area typical receiving large subsidies, whereas cadres in poor localities are either inadequately compensated or fail to get subsidies at all (White, 1990:49). Because subsidies are derived largely from the proceeds of village industry and enterprise, villages with a weak industrial base make the cadres rely on private income derived from agricultural production and on bonuses from the township (Oi, 1990; White, 1990).



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The subsidy of administrative district cadres is also low. Chunsheng obtains 101 yuan subsidy per month. Chongshen and ALing only get 90 yuan and 88 yuan respectively.

The village cadres whom I interviewed attributed the deterioration of power to the weakness economic power of collective.<sup>11</sup> Chunsheng said:

*Our authority cannot compare with before. In the collective era, the peasants were more obedient because they depended on us for many things such as the problem of feeding. But now the peasants households do the work individually. Basically, they do not need the assistance from us. Today, collectives lack funds. We cannot afford the funds for public affairs such as irrigation conservancy and road paving. As a result, the villager think that we are useless to serve them. So nobody listens to our order.*

Chongshen expressed the similar opinion.

*Grassroots cadres now are powerless. We cannot order the villagers to do anything as before. On the other hand, if they ask you to do the things for them, you cannot refuse. If you don't satisfy their request, they will say you are useless. Collectives now have no money. No money, no power! If the cadres can't manage business well, they will look down upon you like a dog! In Deng's China, who thinks anything of us?*

In sum, the remaining functions of the local administrative organization are to 1) transmit the state policy and message to village; 2) keep and contract out the public access; 3) collect the tax and fee; 4) implement the family planning policy. Without the strong backing of the local

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<sup>11</sup>. Based on Oi's argument, the rural industry and enterprises provide the collective basic of the village. They provide the opportunity for the village cadres to control the resource of village. So she hypothesizes that in villages with high industrialized level, the village cadres obtain more power to control the village.



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government in terms of finance and coercion, the village cadres find that it is difficult to implement the policy.

### **IV. Conclusion - An Unorganized Rural Community**

The reconstruction of local administrative organisation implies the withdrawal of the state from the village. The state now only concerns itself with maintaining order and the collection of taxes. In empirical research conducted by other scholars, they find the social structure of natural society has been modified by the recent changes, which has strengthened the family, kinship ties, the lineage, and the village (Potter & Potter, 1990). However, the findings in my village suggest that rural reform is not necessary to bring a revival of traditional organizations. Staying in the village for about two months, I experienced the mid-autumn festival, spring festival, harvest season and Chongyang festival. Theoretically, all these festivals are important to the peasants. I expected that there were some group activities such as religious rituals to be held in the village. However, I could not find anything. The everyday affairs and the festival activities were held based on the unit of individual households. This feature seems to support Siu's argument that the Marxist state has managed to destroy the traditional culture and society. The influence



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of the socialist state was more than superficial. As she stated,

*One therefore wonders whether popular rituals today are revivals or new interpretations of tradition under the powerful influence of the Marxist state. I would argue that they are the latter. In the 1980s, I see the elaborate presence of the party-state making itself felt on social life through individuals who have internalized what state power means and what one reminds one not so much of what has been retained, but of how much rural society has been transformed after revolution (Siu, 1989:11).*

If Ku Village shares the similarity with other village elsewhere of pre-1949 China, I think that the influence of Mao's collectivization and political movement on Ku Village is deep and far because the traditional organization has disappeared even after the rural reforms since the late 1970s.<sup>12</sup> In Mao's China, collectives replaced the functions (such as irrigation program, education, military, welfare services and so on) of the traditional organizations. As Fei states, the rural organizations emerge because of functional necessity. The peasants often need cooperation in the irrigation program which the individual family often cannot afford. For security, the villagers have to organize themselves in fighting the invasion of outsiders (Fei, 1992). The commune system basically combined all the functions of traditional organization. I think this replacement is successful.

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<sup>12</sup>. I do not mean that the resurgence of traditional organization is impossible in future.



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The socialist state also intended to replace the functions of individual household as the unit of production and accounting. But this revolution seems to have failed. The collective farming at least guaranteed basic securities (such as grain ration, welfare funds and health care) that Chinese peasants had not enjoyed in the past. But in the poor mountainous area like Ku Village, peasants always lived close to subsistence margins. The collective farming did not bring any improvement of living standard, and the peasants household still fends for itself (Parish, 1985; Nee, 1985). As Nee states,

*the minimal welfare system combined with a lack of a tradition of charity, even between kinsmen, render peasants all the more dependent upon their family as a source of basic security and well being (Nee, 1985:170).*

After the decollectivization, no organization emerged to substitute the vacuum of the paralysed or semi-paralysed village organs in Ku Village. There is no family growing into a powerful group whose members demonstrated patrilineal descent from a common ancestor. There is no cooperatively owned properties except the ancestral halls and *guanyin* temple. No elder and wealthy kinsmen can held the collective rituals. No one can control the trade as well as local agricultural production through credit and trade monopolies. Based on Fei's view, that the traditional organizations do not occur may be due to its functional unnecessary. So it is unreasonable to think that households have to cooperate in cultural and religious



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practices. To the Kus, they think that the cooperation between the villagers is not necessary and the traditional organizations are meaningless to them nowadays. There is little opportunity for the villagers to cooperate in long term. So there is no need to establish the permanent organization and institution in the village. The cooperation in Ku Village is temporary and occurs issue by issue.<sup>13</sup> So in Mid-Autumn festivals, *Chongyang festival* and Chinese New Year, I found the Kus worshipped their ancestors and *guanying* by individual households. In the worship process, the households of the village compete with one another for wealth and prestige through comparison of their sacrificial offerings, rather than cooperating in the process. In agriculture production, the individual household is adequate as a production unit. So the villagers have no reason to prefer cooperative work arrangement (I will discuss and describe the economic life of Ku Village in detail in Chapter Five).

The reconstruction of the local administrative organization also has eroded the patron-client bond between the village cadres and villagers. The rural cadres in Mao's era basically depend on the outside backing of state to guarantee his domination of local resources. As their

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<sup>13</sup>. Because the administrative district committee cannot afford the road paving, villagers organize themselves and form a temporary road paving committee. They prepare to write the letter to the overseas villagers and ask them to donate the road paving fund. This committee is led by a villager, Uncle Bing, whose sister often donates the fund for public affair in village such as temple repairing, bridge construction, school construction and so on with other overseas villagers.



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authority was provided by the state, the withdrawal of state's support (including the financial and coercive force) has destroyed the power of the patrons. Now they are powerless to implement the state policy and perform their role of local patrons who protect the interest of the village and provide the welfare service to the villagers. They have lost their legitimacy as local leaders.



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### The Ku Village in Transformation (II) -- The Source of Peasant Power

*The small-holding peasants form a vast mass, the members of which live in similar conditions but without entering into manifold relations with one another. Their mode of production isolates them from one another instead of bring them into mutual intercourse.... Each individual peasant family is almost self-sufficient; itself directly produces the major part of its consumption and thus acquires its means of life more through exchange with nature than in intercourse with society. A small holding, a peasant and its family; alongside them another small holding, another peasant and another family.*

--- K. Marx, 1958

The intention of Marx to map out the unorganized political action of the peasantry is to point out that different modes of production will determine different political behaviour of the agents and classes. Although I am not an economic determinist, I still recognize that the local economic structure will constrain or influence the political action of the local people. In more than two decades, the state initiated efforts to develop and consolidate collective farming and impose ideology on the rural society. However, the collectivization only changed the peasants' life in form, but not in nature. As I present in Chapter Three, villagers lacked genuine enthusiasm when working on the collective fields; by contrast, they put in much effort to work on household private plots and sidelines. The performance of peasants



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greatly influenced the productivity of agriculture and hindered the capital accumulation of state.

The only way to overcome sluggish and almost stagnant agricultural production was for the Chinese government to dismantle much of the commune structure and require the production team to contract out the teams' land to the village families. In the late 1970s, when rural reform began, the peasants in many areas moved quickly to dismantle collective farming chose instead to farm as individual households. The responsibility system and division of land seemed to erode much of cadres' former power which was based on their position within the bureaucratic hierarchy and exercised through control of resources that determined peasants' economic well-being. The village cadres no more intervened in the daily production. The peasants obtained autonomy in decision making and in the production process.

But some scholars (eg. Oi, 1989 & 1992; Nee, 1991 & 1992) argue that the village cadres still control the most important resource (land) of the peasants because the land remains collectively owned. The village cadres also control the contracting out of rural enterprises and various pieces of equipment, as well as of orchards and fishponds. I agree with them that resource dependency is still the control mechanism of the village organs and its agents. However, the empirical findings in Ku Village tell us that although village cadres control the contracted



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land, they lost their control over the economic life of villagers. To grasp this political reality, studying the process of economic transformation in Ku Village becomes necessary.

### **I. The Responsibility System and Land Redistribution in Ku Village**

The core of the new agricultural policy adopted was the so-called "production responsibility system". Responsibility systems for agricultural production were experimentally introduced beginning in 1978, and have spread to all the rural area of China nowadays. The central theme was to reorganize production from one based on the collective to one based on the individual households. It aims to stimulate the enthusiasm of peasants in production and increase the agricultural productivity because peasants will earn whatever they can get from the land and their income is once again related to their effort and performance.<sup>1</sup>

Different teams employed different kinds of systems in the early 1980s. But in Songnan commune, all the brigades adopted the "big contracting of production" system in 1981 (See Table II).

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<sup>1</sup>. There are enormous kinds of responsibility system occurring from 1979 to 1985 such as: specialized contract, compensation linked to output (*zhuan ye cheng bao, lian chan jichou*); unified management, output linked to labour (*tong yi jing ying, lian chan jichou*); production contracted to groups, compensation linked to output (*bao chan dao zu, lian chan jichou*); Production contracted to household (*bao chan daohu*) or linking output to the household (*lian chan daohu*); tasks contracted to household (*baogan daohu*) or big contracting of production (*dabao gan*) (Hartford, 1985).



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Table II. Production Responsibility System in Mei County 1981

Commune	Brigades	Teams	Type1	Type2	Type3	Type4	Type5	Type6	Type7
Chengdong	13	163	2			1			160
Chengbei	20	289	9			1			276
Chengjiang	16	229	4					3	218
Meijiang	13	193	1					7	192
Shishan	12	246	2						244
Meixi	15	224	5						217
Shikang	14	177						2	177
Shuiku	2	9							9
Daping	12	161	1						160
Nankou	18	285							280
Yaoshang	14	167	3			5			164
Hesi	15	198			1				195
Jingyi	5	56							56
Fangjiang	17	273							273
Shuiche	18	217	1						216
Meinan	13	143							218
Changsha	12	106				1			104
Xiyang	14	127							127
Baigong	14	170	2						168
Bicun	22	266	1	2			1	16	246
Yanyang	16	182	34				1	4	143
Sancun	12	116	2						114
Songkou	16	205					1		204
Songdong	11	105						1	104
*Songnan	13	149							149
Songyuan	22	376	5						371
Longwen	14	227	3						224
Taorao	15	161							224
Baidu	24	278	5				3		270
Fuda	4	58						2	56
Songkou town	2	22							
Total	428	5578	81	2	1	8		36	5443

Source: Mei county Statistic Bureau, 1982. *Agricultural Statistic Data of all Communes in 1981.*

Note: Type1 - Collective Production  
 Type2 - Partial Contracting out System  
 Type3 - Specialized Contract, Compensation Linked to Output  
 Type4 - Production Contracted to Groups, Compensation Linked to Output  
 Type5 - Unified Management, Output Linked to Labour  
 Type6 - Production Contracted to Household  
 Type7 - Linking Output to the Household or Big Contracting of Production

In the household contracting system, an individual household receives a contract for fixed plots of land in return for fixed payment and obligation to the state (including taxes, welfare funds, collective investments, procurement quotas and so on). The household keeps all



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other produce for its own use or for sale. This method implies that there is no more "unified distribution" of the teams' products. Peasants basically become self-employed and they "compensate" themselves directly with their own output. They have also responsibility for providing their own food needs.<sup>2</sup>

The "big contracting of production" are accompanied by land redistribution. In Ku Village, the responsibility system and land redistribution was carried out in 1980. The whole process is reconstructed through the formal interview with the village cadres and informal interview with the villagers.

According to Uncle Bi, the former brigade cadres, the policy of "big contracting of production" (*dabao gan*) was not implemented smoothly because there were different reactions and responses to this policy among the villagers and cadres. The villagers, brigade and team cadres popularly accepted and welcomed this policy. But the commune cadres was not willing to carry out this system. He said:

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<sup>2</sup>. People interesting in the details of other kind of responsibility system can read Kathleen Hartford, 1985, p31-61. "Socialist Agricultural Dead: Long Live Socialist Agriculture! Organizational Transformation in Rural China" in E.J. Perry and C. Wong Eds. *The Political Economy of Reform in Post-Mao China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. People interesting in the detail of division of land and responsibility system in rural China can also read G. E. Johnson, 1982. "The Production Responsibility System in Chinese Agriculture: Some Examples from Guangdong." *Pacific Affairs* 55:430-451; E>R. Judd, 1992. "Land Divided, Land United." *The China Quarterly* 130:338-356; A. Lu, 1987. "The Reform of Land Ownership and the Political Economy of Contemporary China." *Peasant Studies* 14:229-249; J. Unger, 1985-6. "The Decollectivization of the Chinese Countryside: a Survey of Twenty-eight Villages." *Pacific Affairs* 58:585-606.



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At that time, the commune cadres could not straighten out their thinking. They thought it was only taking the road back to "old society" if all the collective land was distributed to individual. But we [brigade cadres] strongly welcomed the policy because it was the way for bringing us to riches. In reality, dividing the land to the household only means renting the land to the individual, but not the individual having the ownership of the land. Their thinking are foolish! But under the pressure from upper government and local masses. In the end, the land had divided to individual households.

But in Uncle Nianhua's interpretation, the commune cadres in fact did not worry about "taking the road back to old society" (zou huitou lu), but worried about losing their power. He told me another story about the land division.

They [commune cadres] were not willing to carry out the policy because they worried that they would lost their power to control us. After the land division, the commune no more retained their role in centralized planning the production and unified distribution of the resource. We [the brigade] need not listen to their orders any more.

The local cadres felt that they were scapegoats for past mistakes. After the decollectivization, these cadres lost the most because the collective economy that had given them power was dismantled. It is not too difficult to understand the mixed reactions of the rural populace to the reform. The commune cadres certainly wanted to prevent any change that will threaten their power and interest. The victims, of course, hope the reform will break the inequality and bring them out from poverty. The peasants welcomed the decollectivization because they have lost confidence in collective economy.



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Ku Village has 61 households with a total population of 260, and a total labour power of about 95. In 1981, the production teams in Ku Village adopted a responsibility system locally referred to as "divide the land to the households" (*fentian daohu*). The land includes wet fields (*shui tian*) and dry land (*han di*). The wet fields and dry land were divided into three grades, determined by quality, productivity, degree of slope and irrigation conditions. Land was allocated to households based on the number of mouths to feed and its available labour supply. Household representatives drew lots for plots in each grades. In Ku Village, the wet fields occupies about 210 *mu* and the dry land is about 37 *mu*. Each person can receive only 0.8 *mu* cultivated land. The land divided by drawing lots will make the household receive their allotment in scattered pieces, but the villagers believed that it was a fairly easy arrangement for to the division of land. More important, they believe that this method would reduce dispute and conflict between the villagers because it is decided by their fortune. Nothing is to blame except their own fortune. Some villagers abandoned their assigned field in remote areas.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>. Some other villages in China also used the similar method. People interesting in details can also read K. Li, 1986. *Chinese Peasants Life in Social Transformation -Case Study of Taoyuan Rural Community*. Hunan People Publisher; I. Thireau, 1988. "Recent Changes in a Guangdong Village." *Austrialian Journal of Chinese Affair* 19: 241-268.



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After the division of land, each peasant household had to meet the compulsory rice purchase quotas. The purchasing price of grain was 28-30 yuan per 100 jin. Before 1992, the villagers had to meet the compulsory rice purchase quotas in kind. The peasants have to pay 30 jin each mu. But in 1992, a new rule allowed the peasants to pay their rice-delivery quotas to the state in cash, rather than in rice. The taxes are collected by the administrative district committee. According to Uncle Leng, the cadres take up this task because the cadres can earn the commission from the tax bureau. This policy releases peasants from the rice production and allows them to shift to more profitable commercial agriculture. Others also use their contracted land to grow fruit and vegetables. Apart from the compulsory grain purchase quotas, peasants also have to fulfil some other responsibilities. In Ku Village, the households have to pay the five guarantees grain (*wubao liang*),<sup>4</sup> education grain (*jiaoyu liang*) and favouring treatment grain (*youdai liang*). The money is used for public works, for education and for different social services. For instance, the money of five guarantee grain is allocated to the old peasants supported by the collective under the five guarantees program. According to Granduncle Wende, the old peasants

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<sup>4</sup>. The childless and infirm old persons who are guaranteed food, clothing, medical care, housing and burial expenses by the government.



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of "five guarantee household" are all sent to the elderly house in *xiang*.<sup>5</sup>

The other properties of the village also have been distributed to the villagers. Farm tools, from shoulder poles to winnowing baskets, were sold off to all of the families. Even the expensive ones such as tractors, were sold to the villagers whose cash came from the remittances from their overseas relatives. The villagers without overseas relatives were be unable to afford the cost. The threshing workshop also was contracted out to the villagers.

Furthermore, the teams and brigade's fruit trees and fish ponds were contracted out to the villages. The contracted households have to pay each year the sum they had bid, and in exchange they gained total right over the yields of the trees and ponds. In Ku Village, five public fish ponds have been contracted out to the villagers from 500 yuan to 1000 yuan per year. The total contract fee of all collective property is about 5,200 yuan per year. The expenditure of villagers' committee mainly come from this

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<sup>5</sup>. There are a variety of peasants' responsibilities to government in different places. According to the villagers, they think the burden is not too heavy when compared to other rural areas in other provinces. It is reported that the peasants are affording the heavy burden of government. There are different items they have to afford. The heavy burdens have aroused the discontent and resistance of peasants. The central government has paid attention on this problem and advocated to reduce the burden of peasants and prohibit the local government to collect the unreasonable taxes from peasants (Farmers Daily, 1993).



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fee. In sum, the village's assets are being parcelled out piece by piece.<sup>6</sup>

### II. Political Economy of Shatian Shaddock Planation

The development of Shatian shaddock plantation has brought another great transformation of Ku Village. Shatian shaddock plantation has become the dominant farming activity in Ku Village and the main income source of the peasant household.<sup>7</sup> The commercialization of the local economy just erodes the remaining control mechanism (land) of village cadres. In this section I will study how the development of a cash crop in Mei county, recurrence of local market, and increase of job opportunity outside agriculture influence the power relationship between the village cadres and villagers.

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<sup>6</sup>. It is reported by different scholars (Siu, 1990; Chan, Madsen & Unger, 1992; Hartford, 1985) that the responsibility system was not always done voluntarily. The reports reflect not only resistance merely from high-place cadres, reports also indicate that the resistance came from local villagers. Some peasants were not willing to divide up their teams' land and equipment and refuse to go draw lots for the parcels of land. This situation is quite different to Ku Village.

<sup>7</sup>. To understand why the peasant have obtained power to resist the village cadres, we have to clearly comprehend the production process of Shatian shaddock. If the village cadres can still control the resource of production (mainly the land) and interfere into the production and trading process of the villager, they basically can maintain their power.



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### *A. The Development of Shatian Shaddock Planting*

There are different versions about when the Shatian shaddock begin to plant in Mei county.<sup>8</sup> The policy of "opening out the wasteland and planting fruit tree" (*kaifan zhongguo*) was formally carried out in 1985. But the peasants of Mei county had widely planted the Shatian shaddock in some villages (but not Ku Village) before the government formally advocated the policy in 1985.

According to the former vice-chairman of Agricultural Committee of Mei county, secretary Li, Yanyang town (the richest town in Mei county) was the first one to practice Shatian shaddock planting in 1973 or 1974. At that time, Shatian shaddock was only treated as sideline activity because the government still insisted "grain must be taken as the key link in agriculture" (*yiliang weigan*). But this sideline activity brought some improvement in living standards to the Yanyang peasants. The experience of Yanyang told Secretary Li that to bring Mei county to riches, the only way was to develop Shatian shaddock planting. In 1974 and 1978, when he was the leader of Yaoshang commune and Songnan commune, he encouraged the brigade to develop Shatian shaddock as the sideline activity. His opinion was criticized by his supervisor,

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<sup>8</sup>. The development of Shatian Shaddock plantation is a complex process which involves the planned intervention by government and the local response of the village. The transformation of the economic structure is an outcome of the struggles and negotiations that take place between government, local cadres and villagers with differing and conflicting social interests.



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since developing cash crops was strictly prohibited in that era. But he continued to experiment with planting in Nanxia commune.

After the rural reform, Secretary Li planned to carry out large scale production of Shatian shaddock in Songnan.<sup>9</sup> But the villagers and grassroots cadres were unwilling to plant the Shatian shaddock because they never planted Shatian shaddock before and worried whether the tree would bear fruit. No one wanted to take the risk of planting shaddock. Secretary Li said that they used persuasion and compulsory means to impose this policy on the villagers. Villagers who planted one sapling would be subsidised four or five *jiao*. The village cadres had to play the leading role and took the lead to plant the Shatian shaddock. Each team also had to fulfil the quota of planting. If the teams failed to fulfil the target, the village leader would be punished with the deduction of bonus. To enhance the confidence of peasants and grassroots cadres, Secretary Li organized the villagers to visit the planting situation of Nanxia. Chunsheng told the similar story. She said:

*When the policy was transmitted to the village in 1981, the villagers responded coldly because they couldn't be assured that planting shaddock could earn money. We had to take the risk first. In 1984 or 1985, we got the first good harvest. Then the upper government official visited our village and appreciated our result.*

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<sup>9</sup>. Songnan is one the poorest communes in Mei county. It's other bad name is "poor nan" (*qiong nan*) which means that this place is very poor. Ku Village is located in Songnan.



## *The Source of Peasants Power*

Our slogan was "want to become rich, plant the fruit shaddock" (*yaozhifu, zhongguoshu*). Our villagers were very "clever"; from that time on, more and more villagers planted Shatian shaddock.

Uncle Nianhua presented the similar story to me.

At the beginning, even if you freely sent the sapling to the household, no one got it because no one knew whether the tree could bear fruit. So the government had to subsidize the villagers. If you plant one sapling, you would be subsidised five jiao and half jin fertilizer. The Kus was as timid as a sticker. Only a small group dared to try. In the early 1980s, when the policy came down, we had to persuade them about planting shaddock one household by one household.

### *B. The Impact of Shatian Shaddock Plantation*

The statistical data shows the income of peasants of Mei county increased quickly in these sixteen years. In the Table III, we can find the average income of Songnan sharply increased from 62 yuan in 1980 to 1230.3 yuan in 1992, increasing nineteen times. Compared to the average income of whole Songnan township, Xiaohuang was higher, which was 1565 yuan in 1992. Comparing to the whole Xiaohuang Administrative District, the average income of Ku Village was even higher, which was 2000 yuan in 1992 (Mei County Agricultural Committee, 1992).



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Table III. Average Income in Different Townships of Mei County from 1980-92  
(unit: yuan)

Commune	1980	1981	1984	1991	1992
Chengdong	64.4	91	386.0	925	1141
Chengbei	96.6	128.9	355.5	/	/
Chengjiang	103.3	110.9	435.5	1038	1323
Meijiang	67.4	103.8	404.1	/	/
Shishan	83.6	117.5	506.6	916	1178
Meixi	81.1	110.5	365.7	794	985
Shikang	56.2	69	236.0	721	882
Shuiku	61.7	76	/	/	/
Daping	88.5	96.9	334.6	961	1334
Nankou	86.1	89.1	365.5	902	1232.2
Yaoshang	52	66.6	264.6	734	1008
Hesi	75.2	96.9	332.0	888	1107.3
Jingyi	88.6	88.7	251.7	653	905
Fangjiang	67.2	95.8	282.4	783	1154
Shuiche	67.3	102.9	321.7	854	1068
Changsha	90.6	94.1	356.0	/	/
Xiyang	87	99.8	343.0	780	1063
Baigong	93.6	107.2	385.0	951	1216
Bicun	105.6	112.3	349.1	1001	1228
Yanyang	112.9	125.6	515.5	1324	1630
Songbei	81.5	117.3	366.0	952	1232.3
Songdong	72.8	88.0	340.4	931	1160
*Songnan	62.0	94.2	376.2	966	1230
Songyuan	60.6	91.6	244.0	781	988
Longwen	86	93.4	340.0	936	1201
Taorao	81	116.2	374.0	863	1081
Baidu	70.7	101.7	401.6	1036	1318
Fuda	85.5	96.7	399.2	968	1210
Songkoutown	49.3	60.8	254.4	852	1107.1
Meinan	64.7	76.3	312.3	861	1089
Total	78.7	100.2	357.9	916	1178

Source: Mei County Statistic Bureau, 1982. *Agricultural Statistic Data of all Communes in 1981*. [meixian yijiubayi nian gegongshe nongye tongji ziliao]; *Agricultural Economic Productivity Distribution Statistical Report in 1985 & 1992*. [yijiubawu he yijiujiusan nian nongye jingji shouyi fengpei tongji baobiao]

The villagers attributed the sharp increase of income to the shaddock planting. They often told me that the Shatian shaddock brought them to riches. There are seven households having their own motorcycles. There are two households having tractors. There are twenty-five households buying their televisions. In the village, I can find there are many new houses building in these several



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years. According to my estimation, thirty-five (57.4%) households have built their new houses. "The new house is built by Shatian shaddock" is the popular saying in the village; this means that only after the planting of Shatian shaddocks, villagers can afford to build new houses.

There is another indicator of the importance of shaddock planting in Mei county. In Table V, the data shows that the area of shaddock planting increased from 875 *mu* in 1978 to 112279 *mu* in 1991. The income of fruit occupied 13.1% of total income of Mei county in 1992. In Songnan township, the income of fruit occupied about 61% of its total income and the area of fruit increase from 833 *mu* in 1986 to 3385 *mu* in 1989 (Mei County Statistic Bureau, 1992).

Table IV. The Area and Productivity of Shatian Shaddock in Mei County. (Selected Years).

	1949	1957	1978	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Area ( <i>mu</i> )	530	1005	875	19725	63945	88867	96469	88767	104535	112279
Productivity ( <i>dun</i> )	362	599	80	814	1946	2924	4312	5485	16594	31000

Source: Liu et.al, 1992. *The Rich Road of Mei County* [Meixian zhifu zhi ru]. Beijing: Red Flag Press. Wen & Chen et.al, 1992. *The Shatian Shaddock of Mei County* [Meixiang Shatian You]. Guangzhou: The University of South China Polytechnic Press.

There are different opinions on the role of government in the development of Shatian Shaddock between the villagers and rural cadres. In the interview with cadres and peasants, we are able to identify the differences in



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their views of shaddock planting. They both construct their stories based on their respective interests. According to Chunsheng, the improvement of peasants' life in Ku Village was due to the governments' accurate policy. Because of the lack of cultivated land, the government encouraged villagers to reclaim the wasteland and plant the shaddock. Uncle Nianhua told me that "whoever opens up the wasteland, owns the land" was the policy of local government. The credit cooperative also provided low interest loans to the villagers to purchase the fertilizer, saplings and other resources. Brother Ming and the official of Agricultural Department also emphasized the role of government in the development of Shatian shaddock. They said the government not only provided the low interest loans and subsidies to the peasants, but also provided knowledge of planting technique to the peasants. For example, the Mei county government cooperated with the South China Agricultural University to conduct the research of Shatian shaddock and publish a book of planting techniques. The government also searched the market for shaddock, by holding the Shatian shaddock festivals and introducing the Shatian shaddock to the overseas Chinese and trader from other cities and provinces.

But I heard a different view from the village peasants. The villagers denied that government provided any assistance to them. All the land was reclaimed by themselves. The loan was only provided to the "big



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planting household" (*dahu*). Their funds were mainly come from the remittance of overseas relatives or were borrowed from friends and relatives. Secretary Li also recognized that the credit cooperatives were difficult to provide loan to every household. Basically, the government encourages peasants to be "self-reliant" (*zili gengsheng*). Actually, the whole production and trading process is self-reliant in Ku Village. Certainly, there is little cooperation among the individual households, and there is little assistance from local government and cadres.

There is another difference between the view of government and peasants on the land ownership and the tax on the Shatian shaddock. I will describe the conflict in detail in Chapter Six.

### *C. Planting Process and Cadres Power*

After the decollectivization, all the means and tools of production were no longer distributed by the collective. As I have stated before, the main resource of production of shaddock plantation -- land -- is reclaimed by the villagers, but not distributed by the government. So allocation of land is no longer the power resource of village cadres to control the production of villagers. Shatian shaddock is a plant which does not need to grow on fertile land as rice does. This natural characteristic reduces the physical constraints of shaddock planting. According to Uncle Si, all the flat land in village had



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been fully utilized for shaddock planting. Now the villagers reclaimed the wasteland along the bank of the river and at the slope of back mountain. Some even utilized the rice fields to plant Shatian shaddock trees (although this was prohibited before 1986, according to Uncle Bi).

The other input for shaddock tree planting, such as saplings, fertilizer, tools (eg. water pump) were not in the hands of village cadres. The villagers obtained these resources in the market. In general, peasants have to invest 900 yuan per mu, averaging 30 yuan per tree. The price of saplings increased from 4 jiao in 1980 to 1.2 yuan in 1993, about three times. There are two kinds of fertilizers the peasants used. One is chemical fertilizer and the other is home fertilizer (*zijia fei*). The second one is from the excrement and urine of pig and human being. The chemical fertilizers used for Shatian shaddock include potassium (40 yuan per 100 jin), phosphorus (26 yuan per 100 jin), nitrogen (70-80 yuan per 100 jin). All of them are no longer provided by government. The price of the chemical fertilizer is determined by market. Generally, the shaddock tree begins to bear fruit in three to four years, producing up to 50 years. The income from shaddock is 2000 yuan per mu. The price of shaddock fluctuates according to demand of the market. The water is freely pumped from the river which is also not controlled by the



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village cadres. The peasants also learn their technique from their planting experience and from the books.

Moreover, the peasants are autonomous in the production process. Peasants can make decisions on what to produce, how to produce, and where to sell. They can decide the time distribution of daily life and how much to produce. Broadly, the planting cycle of Shatian shaddock includes the sapling planting, turning up the soil, fertilizing, artificial pollination, weeding, eliminating the insects, irrigation and harvesting.

The sapling is often planted in spring (From February to April) because the rainfall is concentrated in this season. Fertilizing, eliminating the insects, irrigating and weeding is done throughout year. The irrigation of the shaddock mainly depends on the rainfall. In the dry season (mainly concentrating on July, April and September), the villagers often pump the water from the river in the village. So all the households in Ku Village have electric pumps. When the trees bears fruit, the villagers have to put much effort to take care the trees. They visit the shaddock trees twice per day. Some villagers even set up beds under the shaddock trees because the fruits sometimes were stolen by other villagers or outsiders. After picking the fruit (in October), the villagers begin to turn up the soil and spread the fertilizer on the soil. The flowers of shaddock often open in the January or February. The artificial pollination is often done in this period. This



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process will influence the harvest. Basically, shaddock planting is not a time and labour intensive production. There are only two busy seasons in a year (October, January to February). One person can manage 30 to 40 trees. Two or three family members are quite enough in the whole planting process. So the shaddock plantation releases more labour from planting process and allows people engage in other sideline activities such as trading or participating into industry.

October is the busy season of peasants because the villagers gather the shaddock after Mid-Autumn festival. The villagers often have to employ temporary labour in the collection of shaddock. They mutually employ and pay 10 yuan to 12 yuan per day. Voluntary assistance no longer occurs in the village. If they cannot employ the labour inside the village, they will employ outsiders.

The harvest mostly depends on the climate and management. So there is great uncertainty among the villagers. "Living off nature" is always the rule of agriculture. In October of 1993, I was staying in the village. It was raining everyday. The peasants worried very much about the harvest because before the harvest, the shaddock tree must not absorb too much water, or the fruit will become rotten. Everyday, they discussed their situation of shaddock tree. Each households had different extent of lost harvest.



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The trading of Shatian shaddock is a face-to-face transaction process. The town merchants come to the village and directly collect the fruit from the peasants households for resale or export. After getting an agreement on price, the buyers pay immediately and transport the shaddock away. If the villagers cannot sell out the fruit, they have to package the fruit with the plastic preserving bag and store it until they can get a good price. There is some variation in purchasing prices to the villagers. Uncle Si planted 30 trees. He sold 1.5 yuan per jin and earned 6,200 yuan this year. His productivity increased two times compared with 1993. Uncle Chang planted 40 trees, and he sold 1.56 yuan per jin and had 16,000 yuan income. Most households had 5,000 yuan to 8,000 yuan income from shaddock. There were 10 households earning ten thousand yuan and six households earning twenty thousand yuan. Most villagers do not dare to risk storing the fruit until they can get a good price. Uncle Chang expressed his thinking:

*Villagers do not dare to take risks, as you know, we have worked hard for a year. Although the fruit has been collected, if the money is not in our pocket, we don't set our mind at rest. One time we stored the shaddock at home, but my wife cannot get to sleep. But some villagers dare to store the shaddock and wait for the good price. In our village, someone sell 1.8-2.2 yuan per jin. In Chinese New Year, they even sell 3.3 yuan per jin.*

There are villagers collecting the shaddock from other households and directly trading to town and city.



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According to the villagers, most shaddocks are re-sold and exported to Pearl River Delta, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Guangzhou and Shantou. Some even export to Hong Kong and overseas.

I describe the process because I want to point out that the local government lost its power as it cannot intervene in the production and trading process with the villagers. They also cannot influence the price of shaddock. They cannot act as the middlemen to dominate the market and countryside through wholesale activities. In other words, the government cannot influence the survival of peasant households. Like the villagers, the village cadres plant their Shatian shaddock and trade their fruit directly with the buyers. The local government cannot monopolize the purchasing and distribution of agricultural commodities. Furthermore, they do not have the new responsibility to find market for the peasants' crops as Oi described. Their positions do not provide any advantage for the village cadres.

### *D. The Other Income Sources*

After the decollectivization, in rural regions, the market once again became the most important trading institution.<sup>10</sup> This is what is usually called a periodic

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<sup>10</sup>. The local market can be defined as "an authorized public gathering of buyer and sellers of commodities meeting at an appointed place at regular intervals" (Chui, 1981).



### *The Source of Peasants Power*

market. The villagers of Ku Villagers visit the periodic market six times per month on 5th, 8th, 15th, 18th, 25th, 28th. On the market day, I can find the undifferentiated role of the villagers. The producer, consumer and trader are usually the same persons in Ku Village. The villagers often sell their product such as vegetables, fruit, pork, and chicken in market. At the same time, they buy the daily necessities in the market. The villagers also engage in other part-time activities such as transport service. For example, Brother Xin often transports the goods for the villagers by his tractor between Songkou town and Ku Village. Some villagers also use their motorcycles to send the villagers to the town market because there is no public transportation in Ku Village.

This kind of economy allows a rational division of time between production, trade and other activities in order to achieve a fuller employment of the most abundant resource -- labour. The surplus labours often find the job in Pearl River Delta. Ten percent of the young people leave the land and become workers in factories.

The recurrence of the local market replaces the role of local government in distribution of local resources. There is no need for the villagers to establish good relations with local cadres and become clients to them. The job alternatives outside agriculture also release the villagers from over-dependency on land which may be the



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only control mechanism of local cadres after the decollectivization.

### III. Conclusion - The Autonomous Peasant Households

The transformation of economic structure of Ku Village has had a big impact on the life of the villagers. The household-based mode of production shapes the power relationship between the cadres and villagers. The cadres are no longer allocating work assignments, administering work points and regulating private plots. All these powers are transferred to the hand of peasants. The villagers once again control their own production process which erodes the power of village cadres to intervene in their everyday practice. But this does not mean that the village cadres totally lose their power, because the formal ownership of the key means of production (land) is still in the hands of the production team and brigade.

Unintendedly, the development of shaddock devalues the rice production as well as the cultivated land contracted out by government. The higher income of shaddock planting combined with the low profits and the high costs of grain production have resulted in a surplus of land (contracted land) in Ku Village. The purchasing price of grain is very low, only 28-30 yuan per 100 jin. Before 1992, the villagers had to meet the compulsory rice purchase quotas in grain. But in 1992, the Guangdong government abolished the tax paid in kind and allowed the peasants to meet the



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compulsory rice purchase quotas in cash.<sup>11</sup> This policy releases peasants from the rice field and the peasants have more freedom to engage in other sideline and non-agricultural activities. So in Ku Village, peasants want to dispose of or at least to decrease the amount of land they originally contracted for under the responsibility system. Some households like Uncle Si have transferred the contracted land to other households which have more labour power. After the transferring of land, the tax is paid by the new holder of the land. Now most peasants family plant the grain only for self-consumption. The surplus land is used to plant the shaddock tree. The devaluation of contracted land and the change of tax policy also erode the power of village cadres as they cannot control the land of peasants any more through the contracts. The village cadres still maintain the power in some rural regions of China because the rice production is still the dominant farm activity and the contracted land greatly influences the survival of the peasants.

The introduction of the market also means the peasants can obtain their resource of production in the market, and not depend on the distribution of state. Small scale agricultural production, small scale ownership and small scale exchange are three characteristics of small peasants'

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<sup>11</sup>. Before the change of tax form, the grain is collected by grain bureau. Now the cash is collected by the tax bureau. The government intends to transfer market risk to peasants as government collecting the tax in kind has to bear the fluctuation of grain price in market.



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economies. This kind of economy makes the peasants' household more independent and reduces the middlemen's services to a minimum as the peasants often can provide their own needs adequately. The small scale and face-to-face transactions of Shatian shaddock between the buyers and the individual households actually eliminate intermediaries and brokerage. At the same time, this type of face-to-face transaction also serves as a buffer to check the external impact which threatens to siphon off the economic surplus from the locale. In the face-to-face transactions, the price is negotiated between the producers and wholesalers. If the peasants feel the price is unreasonable, they can store their Shatian shaddock and wait for a higher price. Shatian shaddock is not a highly perishable fruit; it can store for 200 days. So the villagers need not sell their goods as quickly as possible if they have other sources of income such as some family members working in factories or engaging in other sideline activities.

In short, the transformation of the local economy totally breaks down the patron-client bond between the village cadres and the villagers. The basis of cadres' power has been eliminated since they no longer control the local resource (especially the land), nor provide any assistance to the villagers. On the other hand, the peasants households have obtained their autonomy and independence in production and transaction. There is no



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need for them to exchange their support and loyalty for more resources and benefits. So it is not surprising to find the erosion of the patron-client bond in Ku Village.

Furthermore, this chapter not only intends to explain why and how the peasants obtain their economic power, but also reflect that peasants are rational and self-protective. The success of Shatian shaddock is not only the outcome of planned intervention of state policy implementation. If the shaddock planting does not bring benefit to the peasants, they will not accept the policy. In chapter six, I will point out that the peasants are not passive and just acquiescent to the state policy imposed on them. If they feel the policy is unjust or harmful to their interest, they will adopt different kinds of strategies to fight that policy. They are rational and not "as timid as a sticker", as the cadres described.



## Chapter Six

### Everyday Forms of Struggle in the Ku Village

*The peasantry has acted politically often enough as a class-like social entity. Importantly, also in the world of industrial societies it has shown an ability for cohesive political action. These were not only belated battles of a pre-capitalist type, for their common interests have driven peasants into political conflicts also with capitalist landowners, various groups of capital-related townsmen and with the modern state.*

--- T. Shanin, 1966

In this chapter, I will depict the everyday forms of struggle between the rural cadres and villagers in Ku Village after the rural reform in the late 1970s. I attempt to argue that peasants are not as powerless as Marx states. In Marx's famous comment on the peasantry, he states:

*....They [peasants] are consequently incapable of enforcing their class interest in their own name, whether through a parliament or through a convention. They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented. Their representative must at the same time appear as their master, as an authority over them, as an unlimited governmental power that protects them against the other classes and sends them rain and sunshine from above. The political influence of the smallholding peasants, therefore, finds its final expression in the executive power subordinating society to itself (Marx, 1987:302).*

In Marx's view, peasants are incapable of enforcing their class interest in their own name, and cannot represent themselves. They are powerless to organize themselves due to the household-based mode of production which constrains the small holding peasants to enter



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manifold relations with one another. I basically do not agree with this comment on peasantry. No organization does not mean there is no resistance of the peasants. I do not think that only violence or revolution can be counted as "real resistance", and bring out the significant outcome. The fact in Ku Village proves that peasants, who employed the everyday forms of resistance such as foot dragging, desertion, false compliance, feigned ignorance, slander, sabotage and so on, are also capable to check the state policy and fight for those who seek to extract labour, food, taxes, rents and interest from them. They adopt the "everyday forms of resistance" because it is the most safe and significant way to fight for their own interest. Moreover, it is because the villagers do not intend to openly challenge the existing power arrangement. This kind of resistance requires little coordination or planning. It represents a form of individual self-help. This kind of resistance is not so strange to the Kus as they have become the way of peasants' life. As I have stated in Chapter Three, this form of resistance was prevalent in Ku Village in Mao's China. According to the data collected from Ku Village, I distinguish villagers' resistance into two types: defensive actions and offensive actions.

However, I do not think that exercise of power is a zero-sum game that one gains the power means other will lose their power. Otherwise, I believe that the exercise of power is a "challenge-response" process. So in this



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chapter, I will also adopt the concept of everyday struggle to study the action of village cadres.<sup>1</sup> Facing the challenge of authority from the villager, they do not willingly and gladly surrender their power. They also try their best to keep their power.

### I. Everyday Forms of Resistance I - Defensive Action

The defensive actions of the villagers often claim threatened rights which the villagers have already exercised routinely. When the villagers face injustice and unequal extraction and treatment from the government, they often adopt the defensive resistance which aims to defeat or minimize the direct appropriation.

#### A. Resistance to Tax Collection

In Ku Village, the villagers basically are willing to fulfil their responsibility of taxes and meet the compulsory rice purchasing quotas. According to the village cadres, almost all the villagers pay the compulsory rice quotas on time. However, the villagers cannot bear the extra extraction of tax from government. It is because the extra tax extraction of government has invaded their principle of justice and equity. In the events of tax

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<sup>1</sup>. As Scott states, "Everyday forms of resistance are, it should be clear, not a peasants' monopoly. Anyone who has analyzed the measures taken by landowners in the face of an announced land reform, to evade its application to their holdings by dispersing titles, bribing officials, or changing cropping patterns will recognize the pattern" (Scott, 1989:23).



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resistance in Ku Village, I find that the villagers do not just struggle for the material interest, but also for moral concerns -- justice and equity. The conflicts between village cadres and peasants are mainly due to their different understandings of property rights.

In 1985, the campaign of "construction of socialist civilization" (*Shehuizhuyi wenming jianshi*) brought out by Chinese government to enhance the consciousness of "state" or "public" (*gong*). Collecting the fee of contracted land was one of the ways to strengthen the awareness of state ownership of land. The local government planned to collect five dollars from each household. But the villagers of Xiaohuang refused to pay the fee because in their view, they had fulfilled their obligation in grain tax. It was unreasonable to collect contracted fee which was not collected at the beginning of "division of land to household". This dynamic of knowledge involves different concepts and interpretations of "people's obligation".

There is a great contradiction of views toward the ownership of land between the villager and the state. The arable land theoretically remains under the ownership of the collectives and can only be parcelled out as use rights to villagers. To the villagers, the land distribution implied that they owned the land again. But in the view of government, the peasants only have the right to use the land, but not the ownership of the land. Chunsheng clearly explained to me the concept of "public" and "private" when



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I asked her about the process implementation of responsibility system in Xiaohuang.

*"Dividing the land to households" (fentian daohu) does not imply the privatization of land. Most people misunderstand the concept of "public" (gong) and "private" (shi). Although the land is distributed to individual households, the state still maintains the ownership of land.*

Due to these different views of land ownership, the villagers rejected the payment. But the local cadres cannot use coercion to collect the fee as almost all the villagers refused to pay. Taking the position as the middlemen between state and villagers, the village cadres faced pressure from two sides. To fulfil the task of the government, the village cadres had to find the eclectic solution. The village cadres used the collective fund to pay the fee for the villagers, then asked the households to sign their names on the list. In the end, the villagers pay the fee in name, the villagers' committee paid in reality. This event is hard to imagine in Mao's China.<sup>2</sup>

In Ku Village, I know there is another successful resistance of Kus to the tax collection on Shatian shaddock in 1985. Late October is the busy season of the villagers because they trade their shaddocks with shaddock buyers from town. In 1985, the villager cadres were also busy as

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<sup>2</sup>. According the officials of County Agricultural Committee; actually, they know that there are different strategies of the village organization. In Yangyan town, the house only paid three dollars, the other two dollars are paid by the town government.



### *Everyday Forms of Struggle*

they planned to collect the tax of shaddock. The provincial government planned to collect the tax from shaddocks as they thought the villagers had benefited in shaddock harvest. Uncle Chang and his wife recalled the collecting process.

*Chunsheng visited our home when we were trading the shaddock with the buyer. After we received the cash, Chunsheng said that she came to collect the tax of shaddock. She explained that it was the policy of upper government. She used many "sweet words" (huayuan qiaoyu) to persuade us to pay the tax. She acted like a beggar and asked us to cooperate with her. We assumed it was really the state policy and paid about one thousand yuan to her. But, afterward, we found many villagers refused to pay the tax. We regretted paying the tax.*

According to my interviewees, there were different forms of reaction to the tax collection at that time. Some paid the tax like Uncle Chang's family unwillingly; others simply refused to pay the tax; some bargained the amount of tax with the village cadres; some said they would pay just after they verified it was really the state policy. Basically, there was a large proportion of villagers who refused to pay the taxes. Although there were varieties of reactions, there is a principled reason for resisting the tax -- injustice and inequity of the tax.

In this event, a purely economic interest account of this resistance is inadequate. More important, there are inequities and injustice in this collection. The villagers thought that government did not provide any aid for them in the plantation of Shatian shaddock. The basic resource -- land -- is not provided by government. The cultivated land







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is reclaimed by themselves. It is unreasonable to extract the tax from them. They often said: "Money is in our pocket, nobody can get it."

According to Uncle Nianhua, the local cadres actually also did not agree to collect the tax because they thought that peasants had just obtained the profit, and collecting the tax would destroy their enthusiasm. Some villagers threaten to withdraw in shaddock planting. So some village cadres also did not put much effort into tax collection. They reflected the difficulty and problem to the government. In the end, the provincial government temporarily turned down the plan. But the collected money was not returned to the villagers.

In these two cases, the peasants succeeded in checking the state tax collection as they shared common attitudes towards tax collection (even those who paid the tax). Although there was no coordination and organization among the villagers, they individually practised the similar action. The tacit complicity in resistance with the individual strategies raised the political and administrative costs for the regime because the government had to appoint more enforcement personnel and expend more resources if it was determined to prosecute thousands of cases and raise the penalties for noncompliance. More important, the compulsory tax collection would destroy



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villagers' enthusiasm in production which would influence the economy of Mei county.

### *B. Resistance of Labour Extraction*

In Mao China, every year, the water conservancy project was coordinated by the brigade cadres and team leaders. Everyone had to contribute their labour to the collective without any excuse because all the labour belonged to collective. But after the decollectivization, no villagers voluntarily contributed their labour to irrigation work without payment. In Ku Village, I often heard the complaint from the village cadres that they could not mobilize the villagers to participate in the public irrigation program. They attributed this to the "small peasant mentality" of the villagers. As Chunsheng said:

*No money, no way! If you want them [villagers] to contribute their labour, you have to pay for them. Voluntary labour is not a story nowadays. It is due to the "small peasant mentality".*

The head of villagers' committee, Uncle Leng, also complained that:

*.... today, our [villagers' committee] relationship with the villagers is based on cash. No cash, no discussion! Nobody listens to you.*

Why do the villagers resist participating in public work? In daily chatting with the villagers, they explained that it was because there was no need to organize the public work in Ku Village. After the land redistribution to the households, the household becomes the unit of



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production and accounting. In Ku Village, all the households are capable of organizing their production, including irrigation. Now all the households in the village have their own water pumps. They simply pump the water from the river to irrigate their field in the dry season. They think the village cadres organized the irrigation program just because they want to fulfil the task of government. Uncle Xiang said:

*It is meaningless and unrealistic! We really have no need for the public irrigation program. The situation of today is quite different from the collective era. All the land is divided. The organized water program just creates disputes among the villagers.*

*... all the villagers want to irrigate is their field first; all want to occupy the advantageous position in irrigation. We really don't want to conflict with others.*

Because it is functionally unnecessary, the Kus are not willing to participate in public work.

Moreover, after decollectivization, the labour no longer belongs to collective. The government provides no more service and welfare to them, so they also will not contribute their labour to the public work. So they think it is reasonable to pay them if they contribute their labour to public work. They resist participating in public work without payment.

To maintain the public irrigation program, a new form of "water-conservancy management responsibility systems" was introduced by the village organs to improve the irrigation system of Ku Village. Uncle Leng explained that:



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*If we have a water conservancy project, we set the price such as 100 yuan, whoever is willing to take up the job, gets the money. It is quite simple.*

So the villagers' committee contract out the water conservancy project once a year. Although not all the villagers have an interest in contracting the project, this responsibility system is the outcome of peasants' struggling. So we cannot deny that peasants are capable of changing their livelihood and reconstructing their relations with village cadres.

#### *C. Struggle for a Son*

While the rural reform in the late 1970s was introduced to stimulate economic growth, the one-child policy announced a month later was to slow down the population growth. The one-child policy encouraged all couples of the Han majority to limit their family to one child in order to ensure achievement of the national population size target of 1.2 billion in the year 2000.<sup>3</sup>

The policy was strictly implemented in the early 1980s. The systems of incentive (rewards) and disincentives

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<sup>3</sup>. The government advocated that the aim of the policy is to: "...improve the per capita availability of food, clothing, housing, health care, education, transportation, and consumer goods, to ease problems in employment, and to speed the pace of overall economic development" (Aird, 1982:287).



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(penalties) were implemented in most provinces.<sup>4</sup> But beginning in the mid-1980s, the policy's goals and means were relaxed and softened.<sup>5</sup> In the provincial document of Guangdong, the number of conditions under which rural couples were allowed to have two children was increased in 1984 and 1988. It was clearly stated that:

*We encourage the rural population to have one child, the second child is allowed under the plan, quotas and four year intervals. We strictly prohibit the third child and unplanned second fertility and unmarried birth (Document, 1986).*

So that by decade's end the majority of rural couples could have a second child. But in Ku Village, the goal of the government's birth control is not easy to achieve. Some new couples often have three or more children. It is because the dismantled rural socialist institutions have enhanced the fertility desires and undermined the cadres' power.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>. People having interest in the detail of one-child policy can read Banister, J. 1984. "Population Policy and Trends in China, 1978-83". *The China Quarterly*, Vol.2:715-739; Banister, J. 1985. *China's Changing Population*. California: Stanford University Press; Aird, J.S. 1982. "Population Studies and Population Policy in China". *Population and Development Review*. Vol 8:267-297; Goodstadt, L. F. 1982. "China's One-Child Family: Policy and Public Response". *Population and Development Review* Vol.8: 37-53.

<sup>5</sup>. According to Greenhalgh, "in 1985 the leadership changed the national target for the year 2000 from 1,2 billion to about 1.2 billion, officially interpreted as 1.25 billion. In late 1988 the minister in charge of the State Family Planning Commission announced that the population was likely to top 1.27 billion by century's end, possibly paving the way, politically, for another increase in the official target" (Greenhalgh, 1990:78).

<sup>6</sup>. The scholars of China's population studies widely accept that the loss of control over rural society is triggered by economic reforms, which made it virtually impossible to enforce the birth control policy among the peasantry (Aird, 1982; Banister, 1984; Greenhalgh, 1990; Goodstadt, 1982).



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In Ku Village, the task of birth control is mainly implemented by the women's representative. According to the women's representative, A Ling, there are 17 quota of fertility in Xiaohuang. The quota is distributed by the *xiang* government according to population of locality. She told me that basically Xiaohuang did not exceed quota of fertility. That meant that they could fulfil the task of me. government. She also explained her everyday task

*We often have to visit the new and young couples in the village. If we find an illegal pregnancy, we will persuade them to terminate it. If the persuasion is not successful, we will fine them. But in general, we prefer to adopt the persuasion.<sup>7</sup>*

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Banister summarizes the principal problems of birth control as following:

"1) After instituting the contract system, the relationship between labour and income become even closer. Some of the people believe that "in order to get rich, one must have more boys"...

2) Following the development of production, some of those who have obtained better income and wish to have more children pay no attention to the economic sanctions. They say, "We can afford the penalties. We can support the children. It is up to us how many we want."

3) The original regulations on rewards and punishments and the birth control measures have lost their restrictive power. A section of the cadres and backbone family planning workers is no longer able to receive subsidies for the farm work they miss. This affects their activism" (Banister, 1984:725).

Ku Village shares the same problems as the other rural regions of China. The reconstruction of the local administrative institutions and the responsibility system have undermined the power of village cadres and enhanced the economic power and fertility desire of the villagers.

<sup>7</sup>. However, as Aird states, the use of persuasion is often so aggressive "that it amounts to administrative harassment" (Aird, 1982:284). Its methods include repeated visits by the cadres to have "heart-to-heart talks" (*jiao xing*) with reluctant couples, educating them about the need to control fertility, and mobilizing the women to have intrauterine rings inserted, to be sterilized, or to have an abortion.

The methods of village cadres in implementation of population policy rang from strong persuasion to outright coercion. Although the Chinese government often emphasizes that the family planning is voluntary and suggests to use the public education, the coercion are



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However, like other villages, the cadres in Xiaohuang also adopt the coercion in birth control because the persuasion has not been enough for them to fulfil the state policy. A Ling does not avoid to mention the use of coercion in Ku Village. She told me if the couple with unauthorized pregnancy or higher order birth did not pay the fine, they sometimes confiscated the property of that "illegal family", such as TV, furniture, bicycle and so on, until they paid the fine. The villagers in Ku Village are discontented with the coercive means of the village cadres. They told me that some cadres in other villages even destroyed the house of "illegal family". They said that the behaviour of village cadres was more abominable than *Guomingdang* (National Party) and bandits.<sup>8</sup> But ALing explained that they did not always employ the compulsory method because they also did not wish to hurt the human relationship (*ganqing*) with the villagers. So they only

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often described explicitly in Chinese sources. Chinese government often refers the coercive practices as relying on "administrative orders", resorting to "commandism," pursuing "indigenous policies", "overdoing things" and so on (Aird, 1982; Li, 1985; Hou, 1991). This practices of coercion have aroused the attention of central government. As Aird quotes the *Guanming ribao* of December 1978, "Some localities popularizing birth control have dispatched 'militia propaganda teams' to those households that did not practice birth control to 'propagandize'[them] and exercise control over their food, drinking water, and work points. These local laws have caused great dissatisfaction among the people" (Aird, 1982:284).

Although the central authorities have emphasized that persuasion will work if it is employed properly and warned that coercion in family planning matters must stop immediately, both the urban cadres and villager cadres continue to use the different kinds of coercive means (Aird, 1982; Banister, 1984; Greenhalgh, 1990; Ku, 1992).

<sup>8</sup>. In the film and media of communist party, the government often propagated the dirty image of *Guomingdang* and bandit to the masses. So the *Guomingdang* and bandits only symbolize the evildoer and bastard.



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adopted the coercive method in three "high tides" (*gaochao*) of family planning per year.

The villagers have different strategies to resist the birth control of government. They think the simple way is to *pay the fine*. In Guangdong, the fine has become the only method of penalty in birth control. The problem with an economic penalty is that if the villager's economic power becomes strong, they can easily ignore the policy of birth control and pay no attention to the economic sanctions. The cash seems to legitimize the unauthorized birth of the villager.<sup>9</sup> Uncle Bi made fun of the policy and said:

*The policy tells us that 'best to have one, at most to have two, unplanned birth will be fined'. Ha! Ha! The government tells you that if you have money, you have more children.*

*Desertion* is also a significant strategy of the villagers to resist birth control. The village cadres cannot control the migration of villagers now because the villagers no longer need the certificate of permission from the village government to leave the village. Uncle Bi told me that women with unauthorized pregnancy often left the village and took cover at their relatives' home in other villages, other cities or other provinces. When the babies were born, the women came back to village. The villagers and the cadres called them "unplanned birth guerrilla

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<sup>9</sup>. I conducted the research about the local politics in population policy implementation in urban China in 1992. In the interview, the citizens in Shantou simply answered me that as they can afford the penalty, they could have as many children as they wanted.



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force" (*chaosheng tousheng youjidui*). The village cadres clearly understood this problem. A Ling told me the fine was difficult to collect, and the unplanned birth was also difficult to discover.

*If they [unplanned birth guerrillas] hide in other villages or other places, you cannot catch them. We have much work to do. It is impossible to keep watch on them everyday...*

*Sometimes, when they know that we have discovered their unauthorized pregnancies, they move away all the expensive things from their house. So we can take nothing from their house.*

In the interview in Chunsheng's home, the village cadres showed their grievance and powerlessness in the task of birth control. Chunsheng complained that the family planning was an unpopular program.

*This [family planning] is a hard and thankless task. It often hurts the personal relationship (*gan qing*) between us and the villagers. Nobody [the upper government and villager] can understand the difficulties of the task. If we cannot fulfil the task, we have to pay a cash penalty from our own income.<sup>10</sup> Who wants to take this difficult and unpleasant work?*

The "cadres' job responsibility system" has also been introduced in the population policy implementation. The village cadres have to sign a contract with the government of higher level in order to guarantee the fulfilment of the target or quota of family planning. If the village cadres at different levels cannot fulfil the target, they will be punished. Actually, I do not know if this responsibility

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<sup>10</sup>. Uncle Si told me that Chunsheng told lies. He believed that nobody would take the post of village cadres if they had to pay a cash penalty from their own cash.



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system is really carried out in practice. But when the local cadres are under direct administrative pressure from above to achieve quick results, they often adopt the coercive method because they have no other significant methods. So the peasants have little sympathy for the task run by village cadres because the village cadres in villagers' mind are not their protectors, but state agents who do not care about the interest of the villagers. Some also think that the cadres' work is irrelevant to them and some think the cadres who take the salary have to do the work.

A purely economic interest account of the villagers' struggle for a son is inadequate.<sup>11</sup> Villagers resist the population policy because it contradicts the culture of the villagers. "Carrying on the family line" is always a major reason rural couples want sons in Ku Village. Uncle Xiang gave me the analogy that

*No matter how harsh the penalty, in the mind of "uncle peasants" (nongmin bobo), they always hope the key of their home can transfer to their sons. The daughter is the outsider, we have no reason*

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<sup>11</sup>. The scholars like Greenhalgh (1992) basically think that the economic institution and structure determine the fertility desire of the peasants. They think that under a collective economic regime, the advantages of children, especially the son, have become minimal because the function of children in traditional family were taken over by the team. In a traditional family, the important reason for desiring a son was to ensure economic support in old age. The sons were believed to have more economic benefits than the daughters as they latter will join their husbands' families at marriage. But in collective institutions, the collective guaranteed the basic livelihood of the old. The economic power of the daughter was equal to the son because they earned equal work points in collective.

However, the "five guarantees" offered to the childless elderly was only at the merger level. These merger support told the fact that any rural resident wishing a decent level of living in old age had no choice but to have a son.



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*to give the key of my home to the outsider. All right?*

Another villager, Uncle Qiang, also expressed the same opinion. He said:

*The daughter is not ours. At last, she has to follow her husband. So everyone wants to have a son. I don't understand why our government don't allow us to have a son.*

The villagers seem to be concerned with the reproduction of family rather than just the economic calculation. So if the villagers do not have a son, they will often give birth in excess of the plan. Brother Ming's wife, Liqing, told me that there was a family having their sixth child in order to have a son. Even the cadres, they also hope to have more children if possible. Liqing told me

*I really understand the difficulty of the villagers. Taking the mind of the villagers (jiangxin bixin), although I am a cadre, I also think that one child [daughter] is not enough and safe, best to have two.*

Moreover, decollectivization increases the labour benefit of children, especially the son, because the relationship between labour and income becomes even closer. In villagers' eye, the daughter is not the permanent labour in family. In contrast, the son is not only the permanent labour in family, he can also obtain another labour from his wife's family. The belief that "in order to get rich, one must have more boys" is prevalent in rural China.

In sum, in the birth control process of rural China, we can see that policy implementation is a process of bargaining between the villager and states agent or



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middleman charged with implementation and operating under considerable constraints. The bargaining between cadres and the villagers in the issue of birth control reveals the exercise of power in rural society. This bargaining not only reflects the pursuit of individual material interest, but also reflects the battle of knowledge in life-world.

### **II. Everyday Forms of Resistance II - Offensive Action**

The villagers in Ku Village not just passively respond to the policy imposed by the government, they also take offensive action to protect their interest. They actively adopt the everyday forms of resistance to prevent further extraction from the state, and stop the cadres from resorting to coercion in policy implementation. They also compete for the goods and resources with the state. These actions often remain publicly invisible.

#### ***A. Slander***

Slander is a popular means of resistance among villagers. When I talked with the villagers about their village cadres, they always gossiped that they were useless and were merely in name of cadres. They also belittled the importance of village cadres' task. I often heard the comment such that

*They have nothing to do! They only got the salary. We will not ask them for assistance.*

*I don't know what they have done.*



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*Their jobs are quite simple. Everyone can do that.*

In the quarrel between Uncle Xiang and Uncle Leng (head of villager's committee), Uncle Xiang used the rude and blasphemous language to play down the role of Uncle Leng in Ku Village. He shouted:

*Shit! Don't think you are terrific! You are just same as us.*

*Don't be fierce! I am not afraid of you. Go! Ask Chunsheng to judge who is right and who is wrong. Village cadres, shameless!*

When the village cadres could not solve the dispute among the villagers, the villagers would swear at the village cadres, saying that they did not fill the post with credit. They also made slanders about village cadres, which aimed to damage their reputation. Village cadres such as Chunsheng very much minded the blame and comments of the villagers. Chunsheng said:

*What we cannot tolerate is that our hard work has not been appreciated by the villagers but brings us a bad name. Do you know our job is just voluntary? They must understand that we are serving for them. We really cannot bear their blame and looking down!*

Slander makes the village cadres not wantonly adopt the coercive method in implementation of state policy because they want to keep a good reputation.

### ***B. Sabotage***

Sabotage is another weapon the villagers employed to resist the cadres. If everyday resistance via slander is



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the attempt to express the discontent of villagers toward their government, sabotage is a more defensive effort to fight against the state agent. Chunsheng told me that they did not dare to offend the villager today because the villager would destroy their fruit trees at mid-night. According to Chunsheng, there was a cadre (I do not know his name. He has resigned his post) whose shaddock tree was destroyed by someone. One morning, when he visited his shaddock tree, he found all the fruit of a tree were cut down by someone. But he did not know who cut down his fruit.

Although this event does not often happen in Ku Village, the village cadres have drawn the lesson. So the village cadres told me that they avoid having any conflict with the villagers because they thought some villagers were "rude and uncivilized". This kind of resistance is significant as there is no organization to be banned, but only the generalized noncompliance by thousands of peasants in invisible corner.

### *C. Feigned Ignorance and Underreporting*

Feigned ignorance and underreporting are other significant weapons of villagers to resist state extracting the surplus from rural society. As I stated in Chapter Five, the government had failed to collect the shaddock tax in 1985, but the government did not give up the tax policy of Shatian shaddock. For further tax



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collection, the government ordered the local administrative organization to make statistics about the area and number of the shaddock tree in the villages. It was a hard work of the village cadres because they understood the difficulty and reaction of the villagers in last tax collection. But in this data collection, the village cadres failed to fulfil the task once again because the villagers adopted feigned ignorance as the strategy to resist the investigation.

When I still stayed in the village, the data collection process was in progress. As I knew, when Chunsheng came to inquire the peasants household about their number of shaddock tree, the villagers often did not cooperate with her. Some refused to report the number, and some under-reported or misreported the number of trees. The defensive ones even verbally abused Chunsheng when she asked the villagers about their number of shaddock trees. Most of villagers feigned ignorance and tried to hide the truth by not answering questions clearly or completely. In the mind of villagers, they clearly knew of the aim of the statistics. More important, the villagers suspected that it was not the state policy but the wicked idea (*gui zhuyi*) of local cadres. After Chunsheng failed to fulfil the task, she under-reported and misreported the number of



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shaddock trees of the peasants household in the reporting form.<sup>12</sup>

This event was told by Chongshen because he was very dissatisfied with Chunsheng, feeling that she shirked responsibility to him. When I last visited Chongshen one night, the deadline of the data collection was drawing near. He showed the report form to me and grumbled about many things:

*Now the villagers lack the concept of "public". They do anything for self interest. It is due to the mentality of petty peasants' economy. It is impossible to ask them to contribute some to the "public".*

An old woman (I do not know her) suddenly interrupted him:

*The villagers are poor. They have no money to pay for tax.*

Chongshen angrily said:

*No money? The average income of our village is above 1000 yuan. Today's peasants are rich, but the collective is poor!*

Then he ignored the old woman and continued to talk with me.

*I don't know how to report the data. All the data she [Chunsheng] reported is false. It is impossible to report the data like that. How low her standard of education [wenhua shuiping]! I will not afford the responsibility. I will not change her handwriting! (He continued to grumble).*

I looked at the data in the report form. I found the data really was far from reality. As I knew, the village

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<sup>12</sup>. I agree with Scott that "under-reporting and other techniques were frequently encouraged by local team leader and cadres who had learned the bitter lesson of compliance with planned targets" (Scott, 1989:16).



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households planted at least more than 30 shaddock trees. But in the form, each household only reported five to twenty trees. Chongshen suddenly asked Uncle Si (who had come to visit Chongshen with me):

*Brother Si, how many trees do you own? I think it is really impossible only twenty. Don't tell the lie in front of me....*

Uncle Si just smiled and did not answer his question. Chongshen recognized the bitter lessons of misreporting in the Great Leap. But he said sometimes misreporting and underreporting was necessary in order not to damage the interest of the village. For example, last year, Xiaohuang Administrative District's average income was higher than Dahuang (another Administrative Village). But because Dahuang was an important development district, in order not to compete with Dahuang, he deducted 200 yuan of Xiaohuang's average income in the statistic report form.

### *D. Poaching*

It is often reported by Chinese press that there is serious poaching in state's forest area. The government orders the concerned department to punish poachers severely. In Ku Village, poaching in state's forest area is also serious. As the wood can be sold a high price in market, the young villagers often fell the trees in back mountains of village. According to a young villager, Brother San, one cubic meter wood could sell about 300 yuan. Each time, they could fell about three to four cubic



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meter, and earned about one thousand yuan. As it is strictly prohibited by government, they usually take action at dusk and late at night. But actually, all the villagers, even the village cadres know they felling tree at the back mountain.

It is very dangerous to cut down the so called state-owned tree because the tree is very heavy and the hill is steep and precipitous. When I still stayed in the village, Brother San sustained a severe injury when carrying the tree down.

One day late afternoon, the villager suddenly heard Brother San's cry. Then the news quickly spread out all the corner of Ku Village . When the villagers found him. He was in a state of unconsciousness because he had sustained an severe head injury. Brother Li quickly called a tractor from one village households. Some informed his family and carried the cotton blanket for Brother San. Some gave him some water. Many villagers came out to give a hand. Then several man carried him up to the tractor and sent him to the hospital in Songkou town. The villagers such Brother Li, Uncle Xiang, Uncle Qiang and so on took care for him in hospital over night on shift. When Brother San still stayed in hospital, the villager often visit him. Some gave him money, and some brought something to him.

The solidarity among the villagers was shown in this accident. The villagers behaved no more selfishly. Most of them voluntarily assisted and supported Brother San and



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his family after Brother San was hurt. This event also shows the solidarity among the villagers is not given and autonomous. It only manifests in a specific event and condition. More important, it reflects that poaching in villagers' mind is not a crime. They share the common view of property which conflicts with state's interpretation. It also explains the problems of enforcement of the state are due to tacit complicity, and occasionally active cooperation among the population from with the poacher comes. Several days after this accident happened, Uncle Jiang's wife told me that the cadres of Administrative District came to Ku Village to find out why Brother San was hurt, where he cut down the tree, what tree he felled. In the end, the cadres could not find the answer because the villagers feigned ignorance and said "I don't know!"<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, in the conservation with the villagers, they actually did not think the forest was state's property. However, it was only part of natural resource and cutting down the tree was only part of their traditional practices. They often collected the firewood in the forest and felled the wood for building before the forest was defined as

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<sup>13</sup>. As Scott states, "Consider the difficulties that poachers would face if local residents were actively hostile to them and willing to give evidence in court. Poaching as a systematic pattern of reappropriation is simply unimaginable without a normative consensus that encourages it or, at a minimum, tolerates it. Otherwise it would be simple matter to apprehend offenders.... What is significant is that such coordination can typically be achieved through informal, rural networks and that when an "association" is formal its adherents have every reason - and often the means - to conceal its existence from the authorities the historians" (Scott, 1989:10).



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state property. But now the state redefines the forest as government property and then imposes a whole series of regulations and officials to enforce them.<sup>14</sup>

Uncle Leng, although in name the village head, in this event, I could not find his trace. He never played the role as a village leader. This event tells me why the villager often comment about them -- "useless", "do nothing" and so on.

After Brother San was hurt, I knew that Brother Xin also felled the tree at the late night with several young villagers. His activity was more tactical than Brother San's one. He rented a lorry to transport the wood to Songkou town. Before the action, they often scrutinized the time schedule of the forest guards. Their lorry passed the checking when there was a time gap between the shift. They could earn about 2,000 yuan each cart. They tried to avoid the notice and detection. Even if their vehicle was intercepted by forest guards, they also avoided direct confrontation with the guards. Brother Xin told me:

*When we are intercepted by the guards, we quickly pay the fine. Because after the fine is paid, they won't capture our vehicle. So we have another chance to earn more money. I know*

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<sup>14</sup>. In this event, I agree with E. P. Thompson (1991) and Scott that the most important fact about poaching is that: "The activity itself was part of the traditional subsistence routine of the rural population, an activity embedded in customary rights. Poaching as crime, therefore, entails less a change of behaviour than a shift in the law of property relations. Is the state and its law which suddenly transform, these subsistence routines into everyday forms of resistance" (Scott, 1989:9). Villagers practising their routine life now suddenly becomes committing to crime which Michel Foucault refer to as "state-created crime". So I would interpret poaching action of the villagers as rejection to state power.



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*somebody who hit guards has been put into prison. I don't want to do that. A true man doesn't immediately get the worst of it (Haohan buchi yangqian kui).*

### III. Everyday Struggle of the Village Cadres

In Mao's China, village cadres derived their authority from their ability to intervene daily work and resource distribution. The introduction of responsibility system implies the withdrawal of the village cadres from daily control over the local economy. Their power relationship with the villagers not only changes in form, but in nature.

The local cadres sense that their power is diminishing. They feel that they are betrayed by Deng and its party. In the interview, they recognized that they exercise far less power than village cadres of previous decades. The former cadre, Uncle Nianhua, resigned in 1992 because he felt the local cadres had lost their authority to manage the affairs of village and implement the state policy. He said:

*Since after the land redistribution to the household, every household does the work by themselves. The villagers no more need the assistance of us [cadres], and we have no more resources and opportunity to control them [villagers]. Apart from the disputes between them, they will not want to see us. I felt I am useless to stay at the post. So I resigned.*

Chunsheng was also full of grievance. She complained that:

*Our authority cannot be compared with before. In the collective era, the villagers were more obedient because they depended on us for many things such as the problem of feeding. Now the peasants household do the work individually.*



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*Basically, they don't need the assistance of us.... So they don't obey our orders.*

The local cadres not only lost its power to intervene the daily production of the peasants, but also lost its capability to mobilize the villager to participate into the public affair such as road construction, irrigation work and so on.

However, the cadres still have a certain measure of power over the peasant.<sup>15</sup> Two events happened in Ku Village support this opinion. The first event happened when I visited the brigade accountant Chongshen's home to make a interview. While I was interviewing Chongshen and he was expressing his discontent, a man, about 35 years old, interrupt our dialogue. Chongshen unwillingly and asked the villager why he visited him. The villager said he want Chongshen to seal the letter which he wrote to apply for going to Hong Kong to visit his relatives. Chongshen asked him to show the application letter to him. The man seemed to be unwilling to show the content to Chongshen. He tried to cover the content up and just asked him to seal the chop on the blank. Chongshen was very angry and refused to seal the chop.

*Don't cover the letter up! I really don't want to know anything happened in your family! You'd*

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<sup>15</sup>. As I have stated, power is not a zero-sum game that one gains the power means other will lost their power. As Oi and Nee's argument, the local cadres still maintain their structural advantage to control local resource especially after the fiscal reform (Oi, 1992; Nee, 1991b & 1992). But I do not intend to exaggerate the power of the village cadres like them because the empirical data really do not tell me so. The village cadres still maintain limit capability to control and influence the life of the villager.



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*better not come to visit me ! I don't want to know your secret!*

The man hurried to explain:

*No! Don't say so! I have nothing to mean I don't want you to know what happen. My wife wants to apply for going to Hong Kong to visit her sick aunt...*

Chongshen was still angry and stopped the man,

*Don't tell me what happened of your wife! I really don't want to know! But if I know nothing, I will not seal the chop for you.*

The man continue to explain and passed the letter to Chongshen.

*I have nothing to mean that. But the Public Security Bureaus (gongan ju) in township told me that the letter must be sealed by Administrative District.*

Chongshen got the letter and read the content once. He shook his head and said:

*Your letter is not clear. I really don't understand what you say. Write the application letter again. If the letter is not clear, I will not seal for you.*

The man seemed to be at a loss of what to do. He pleaded with Chongshen to write the letter for him. Chongshen refused at once without any consideration. But Chongshen then taught the man to write a good application letter.

*You must write who your are, why you want to go to Hong Kong, what is the relationship between your Hong Kong relatives and your wife. Write clearly and come to see me again.*

The man got back the letter and went away. Although the "chop power" no more influences the important aspects (eg. survival) of peasant life, the village cadres can make things difficult for the villagers. If the villagers want



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to make thing easy, exchanging the gift with village cadres or keep good relationship with village cadres become necessary. The second event continues to illustrate and elaborate the "chop power" of the villager cadres.

The second event was recalled by Uncle Si's wife. In 1992, the Administrative District planned to collect 20 yuan per person from individual households for the road paving. To the villagers, 20 yuan was not too much today. Because paving road was also benefit them, most of villagers were willing to pay. But some villagers refused to pay the fund because they thought paving road was the responsibility of government. The "chop power" made village cadres in the end successfully collect all the road paving fees. Uncle Si's son, Huangmao, works in the foreign invested factory in Dangshui (one of the towns in Pearl River Delta). Before he went to work in Dangshui, he had to get the certificate of unmarried status for family planning purpose of government. The cadres told him that if his family did not pay the fees, they would not seal the certificate for him. They also informed the family with school children that if they did not pay the fee, their children would not be allowed to attend school in the new term. Their children had to carry the receipt of road paving fee to register in new term.



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People may ask why the Administrative District succeeded in collecting the road fees but failed to collect the land contract fee and tax of Shatian shaddock. In my opinion, the administrative district succeeded in collecting the road paving fee because only a small number of villagers refused to pay the fee. So the village cadres found it possible to use different strategies to control the villagers who resisted to them. But in the event of tax collection of Shatian shaddock and land contracted fee, although the villagers did not consciously organize themselves to fight against the injustice policy of government, they shared similar views of land property rights and taxes of land. The village cadres are impossible to adopt the above strategies to control the village as not all family have schooling children and not all the families have members working outside. So the significance of "chop power" is low. When the solidarity among the village came out, even unconsciously, the "chop power" lost its capability.

In the conversation with the cadres, I felt that they were keen to continue to put most of their effort into ensuring that they still resigned supreme in all aspects of the village public affairs. So for strengthening the collective economic power, according to Uncle Leng, the administrative district planned to establish a cement factory because the village cadres believed that the factory could enhance the income of collective. "Money is



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power" became their belief. He explained that the village cadres in Pearl River Delta obtained their power to control the villagers because they owned many enterprises and industries. If the collective was rich, it could afford to fund different construction projects and provide welfare service. But the project of cement factory was turned down in the end because they lack the funds.

### V. Conclusion

The class relation analysts often claim the everyday form resistance, which is largely taken-for-granted, as a marginal one because they are

*1) unorganized, unsystematic, and individual, 2) opportunistic and self-indulgent, 3) have no revolutionary consequences, and/or 4) imply in their intention or logic an accommodation with the structure of domination. An argument along these lines necessarily implies that "real resistance" is organized, principled, and has revolutionary implication (Scott, 1989:21-22).*

This elitist version of resistance will limit our understanding on the political action of underclass, peasantry and subordinated group. They often assume the peasants and even proletarians who participate in revolutionary movement are aiming at revolutionary objective. Actually, the rank-and-file actors are rarely have revolutionary aims like the revolutionary elites. The slogans or targets of revolution advocated by the elites are often reinterpreted and reconstructed by the rank-and-file actor according to their own interest.



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The peasants have their own dynamic and logic of political action. It is certainly true that peasants rarely intend to make a revolution, and their actions do not openly challenge existing power arrangement. They try to avoid open confrontation and accommodate with existing power relations because open revolution or riots often have to pay a large cost. Chinese history tells us that Chinese peasants do not commit violence until the powerful threaten their subsistence. As Scott state,

*More than one peasantry has been reduced brutally from open, organized, radical activity at one moment to sporadic acts of petty resistance at the next. What has changed in such cases is typically not the aim of the peasantry but the effectiveness of domination (Scott, 1989:22).*

The land dispute in Huiyan of Guangdong basically supports this argument. On 1st April of 1994, there were several hundreds villagers surrounding the village organs in name of anti-corruption. As a result, more than ten villagers were shot by the police and six villagers were arrested (Dongfang Daily, 2nd April, 1994).<sup>16</sup>

So the individual action of everyday resistance is not unreasonable. The individual action is not to say that these actions lack coordination. There is a variety of individual practice with unity of understanding and ideology. They cooperate in the form of silence

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<sup>16</sup>. The village organs got back the contracted land from the villagers and sold the land to the foreign investor. The villager were only pay 200 yuan in the important festivals. The villager doubted the huge sum were misappropriated by village cadres. In September of 1993, one villager organized the mass anti-corruption movement. In the end, the villager and his family members were arrested. This arouse the discontent of villagers. so they organized another movement this year.



### *Everyday Forms of Struggle*

surrounding "thefts" from the village cadres. No formal organization is created because none is required. The everyday forms of resistance are adequate for them to protect their interest and check the unjust extractions from government. So peasants are not powerless, irrational or passive as we thought.



## Chapter Seven

### Conclusion -- From Socialist Clientelism to Household Individualism

*How do I know that you exist, and, if you do, how do I know that my concept represents your real existence?*

--- E.P. Thompson. 1979

This research is about the impact of rural reform in post-Mao China on the village politics. The powerlessness of village cadres, an atomistic rural community, and the erosion of patron-client bonds between village cadres and peasants are the three principal features of Ku Village. Because of this, I conclude that the socialist clientelism no longer exists in Ku Village, instead, household individualism is the dominant feature in the village. The economic and political power among the villagers is relatively equal. No new patron has emerged in the village. The peasants households are independent of village organs or cadres. They carry out their day-to-day production individually. They also respond to state intervention with the everyday forms of resistance in order to protect their interest. To spell out the distinctiveness of village politics in Ku Village, this chapter will lay bare its salient features and conditions which underlie their emergence.



## *Conclusion*

### **I. The Erosion of Patron-Client Bonds**

Ku Village under Mao shared the similar village politics with other rural regions. Socialist clientelism best describes the power relationship in Ku Village in Mao's China. After coming to power in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party moved toward complete centralization of the economy in an attempt to achieve a high capital accumulation. For this purpose, in the 1950s the state monopolized the grain distribution, created the system of grain rationing, and introduced the people's agriculture commune to the village. The villagers had better guarantees for subsistence, but at the cost social and economic dependence on their assigned production team, and their collective production unit, and personal dependence on their team leaders for their income as well as other resource. The closure of markets and lack of available alternatives thus made the peasants participate in the collective production, and thus increased the need for villagers to cultivate the favour of villagers who controlled the resource distribution. The village cadres exchanged the resources to villagers for their loyalty and support.

This forms the patron-client bond between the peasants and village cadres. However, this patron-client bond is unstable in Ku Village. Unlike the traditional patrons, the village cadres have reliable or sustained outside



## *Chapter Seven*

backing of state instead of dependence on the village. They derive authority from their ability to influence the distribution of rewards in collective production. As the village cadres' base of power are dependent on outside backing by police, courts or military to guarantee their domination of local resources, but not their wealth, their contribution to public affair, their giving personal loans and donations and so forth, the relative power of the village cadres is vastly inflated. Their need for clients is reduced and the incentive to serve the community by protecting the local interest against the state is broken. In implementation of state policy, they usually stand on the side of state as their authority is appointed from outside and paid from above. So in the socialist clientelism, there is a lack of balance of exchange in patron-client relations. The patron is in a more commanding position and the clients depend more on the patron. However, this kind of social clientelist relationship is easily broken down when the patrons lost their support from the outside. They lost their base of authority after the retreat of state's support. The reform in the late 1970s inevitably eroded the power base of patron and broke down the patron-client tie in Ku Village. The following figure summarizes the conditions why and how the patron-client bond break in Ku Village.



## Conclusion

Figure III. Structural Change and the Break of Patron-Client Exchange in Ku Village.

Nature of Change	Effect on Patron-Client Relation
A. Reconstruction of administrative organization	village cadres lost their outside support from state
B. Responsibility system and division of land	village cadres lost the key basic of patronage that control the resource distribution and job opportunity
1) monetization of taxation	releases the peasants from the land and engages into other activities; peasants no more depend on the rice land for taxation which weaken the patron power
C. Commercialization of production	
1) cash crop plantation	village cadres lost the remained basic of patronage that control of rice land; cadres's position weaken in dealing with peasants who do not depend on rice land for subsistence
2) abundant supply of unclaimed	land is no more scarcity and villagers no land longer depend on the cadres for obtaining the very mean of production (land); village cadres' position weakened because of decreasing peasants seeking access to rice land
3) face-to-face transaction	village cadres' position weaken as they cannot interfere in the face-to-face trading process
4) opening the local market	villagers' position strengthen as they no need to depend on cadres for production resource
D. Available job opportunity	villagers' position strengthen as they can release from the land control of the cadres
E. Overseas villager factor	villagers' position strengthen as they no more depend on village cadres for credit and financial assistance

In Ku Village, the paralysis of the village organ becomes the striking feature. The reconstruction of local administrative organization breaks the outside support of the village cadres. Although the village organs still represent the state and implement the state policy in the



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village, they can only obtain minimal support from the government (mainly financial support). The fiscal autonomy of village organs only eroded their power because the village organs were incapable of fulfilling the function of local patrons who have the obligation of providing the welfare service and so forth to the villagers. Lack of village enterprise and industry, the village organs can only rely exclusively on agriculture. They are left with few income sources because they get neither a share of agricultural tax nor the profit from peasant sales of grain to state as both go to the central state. The introduction of the responsibility system and the division of land in Ku Village simply destroyed the power of village cadres who directly interfered into the daily life of peasants and controlled the life chance of peasants in the collective era. The Kus were independent in production and no longer dependent on the village cadres for more resource distribution, which also meant that there was no need for the villagers to exchange their loyalty and support with the cadres.

The most important factor to influence the integration of village cadres and peasants is the commercialization of local economy. The shaddock plantation totally destroyed the patron-client bond between the village cadres and villager because almost all of the shaddock fields are claimed by the peasant households. To the Kus, the rice land becomes less important. As a result, the village



### *Conclusion*

cadres lose their last controlled mechanism of contracting out the rice land. The monetization of taxation further releases the peasants from the land and encourages them to engage into other activities because peasants no longer depend on the rice land, which are still controlled by village cadres for taxation. The face-to-face transaction process between the villagers and traders also prevented the intervention of the local cadres. Whoever has the capability to control the trading process can become the new patron and maintain a dependent relationship. It is the unintended consequence of the state policy which promotes peasants' autonomy in production and enhances their economic power; on the other hand, it erodes village cadres' ability to extract and allocate the agricultural profits, and the mainstay of village income.

The opening of markets, available job opportunities and the overseas villagers factor<sup>1</sup> also enhance the peasants power and make the peasants no more depend on the village cadres.

For the client, the basic purpose of the patron-client relation is the provision of basic social guarantees of subsistence and security. After the economic reforms, the village organs in Ku Village no longer serve these functions; instead, the individual household becomes the unit of subsistence and security provision. So the patron-

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<sup>1</sup>. I guess it is also a factor to decrease the dependence of the villager on the village cadres. But the limit of empirical data prevents me from extending this point.



## *Chapter Seven*

client relation between villager cadres and peasants does not need to be maintained.

Now the remaining functions of village cadres are to implement the state policy and collect the taxes. Actually, the village cadres have no great difference to the villagers. They also plant in their own field and pay the tax. Their position in village organs provides no more advantages for them. Lacking of control mechanisms, they find it difficult to implement the state policy. The direct impact of the erosion of patron-client bond is the powerlessness of the village cadres in policy implementation.

### **II. Household Individualism - an Atomistic Community**

The erosion of old patron-client relationship does not imply the emergence of new patron in the village. In Ku Village, there are not any new organizations such as kinship, religion and so on to replace the functions of brigades or production teams. There are not any households or local elites to control the very local resources (land) or provide service and protection to the villagers. It is an atomistic community. It is a community without patrons. It is a classless village. It is a village with economic and political equality. The households in village do not mutually intervene each other. So household individualism best describes the phenomena of Ku Village.



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From an economic perspective, household individualism reflects the recurrence of small peasants economy. The small scale exchange, small scale agricultural production and small-scale ownership make the individual production possible. The peasants are self-reliant in production and transaction. They own their means of production. They reclaim the land for shaddock plantation. They obtain other resources through market. The face-to-face transactions are managed by the individual households. So there is no functional necessity for them to cooperate in daily practice because the individual households continue to be adequate production units which are capable of handling the full cycle of agricultural production. Even when they have, the cooperation is temporary and informal.

From a political perspective, household individualism reflects in the everyday forms of resistance which require little or no organized and planning in resistance. They also respond individually to the extraction of government with everyday forms of resistance. Peasants prefer individual action and make their resistance to a minimal disadvantage. So it is difficult to find collective resistance in the rural society like Ku Village. The individual household becomes the unit of political action. I will discuss this in more detail in the following section.

In short, there are several features of households individualism:



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- 1) The household is a political and economic unit;
- 2) The peasants depend on their households for subsistence and security;
- 3) The peasants are likely to prefer individual household production over cooperative form of production if there is no need to cooperate with other peasants;
- 4) The peasants are likely to adopt everyday forms of resistance to fight injustice and unequal state policies which threaten their household interest.

### **III. Everyday Forms of Resistance as the Way of Peasant Life**

Evidence from Ku Village tells us that everyday forms of resistance are significant for peasants to protect their own interest. They do not intend to afford the luxury of open, organized, political activity. It is because of institutional constraints. More important, the villagers are far less interested in changing the larger structures of the state and the law. They often express that they are satisfied with their life and appreciate Deng's rural reform. In addition, formal, organized political activity is not their aim. Otherwise, they prefer the sporadic, unorganized, individual, but constant struggle against those who seek to extract taxes, rent and interest. As Scott often states, the peasants require little or no coordination or planning in resistance. Their resistance represents a form of individual self-help, and they try to avoid any direct, symbolic confrontation with authority



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(Scott, 1985, 1989). To the villagers, such kinds of resistance are often the most significant and the most effective over the long run.

Although in Mao's China the extent of institutional constraint is larger than in post-Mao China, they constantly employ the everyday resistance as their weapon to protect their self-interest. This form of resistance has become the way of peasant life or peasants' political culture. They practice this resistance everyday, consciously or unconsciously. No matter under what kind of institution, this kind of resistance is the most safe. They do not need to plan, organize and mobilize the other villagers because they lack these techniques. Their consensus and solidarity is shared by the villagers. They cooperate with others in the form of silence, cheating, feigned ignorance, hiding the facts and so forth, which protect the resisters from the cadres.

The evidence of Ku Village not only proves that the everyday forms of resistance are significant to the villager, but also reveals that the peasants are not so powerless as we thought. Although I do not intend to reject the version of "real resistance" which is organized, principled, and has revolutionary implications, I think that this elitist version of resistance will limit our understanding of the political action of the underclass, peasants and subordinated groups. Actually, they rarely have revolutionary aims like the revolutionary elites. The



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slogans or targets of revolution advocated by the elites are not necessary representing the goals and interests of peasants. It is unfair to judge the political action of peasants based on elitist perceptions.

The peasants have their own dynamic and logic of political action. So the individual action of everyday resistance is not unreasonable. The individual action of different persons is not to say that these actions lack coordination. There are varieties of individual practice with unity of understanding and ideology. No formal organizations are created because none are required.

### **IV. Rethinking Village Politics in Dengist China**

Although my finding is different from some other scholars' (eg. Oi and Nee) conclusion about the local politics in post-Mao's China, I do not intend to refute their argument and generalize that all the village politics as my case. If I intend to do so, I also make the mistake like "a blind person touching the elephant" that thinking whole reality just like the part I touched. The rural situation in post-Mao China was more complex than Mao's China. In Mao's China, the village politics were in a more uniform pattern as the political and economic situation in different villages were almost the same. All the peasants became members of the collective. Participation in collective labour became the only means of obtaining subsistence. The collective mode of production combining



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with the closure of markets and other available alternatives created the similar political and economic structure in rural China. The villages basically shared similar politics in Mao's China. After the political and economic reforms of rural China, there are variations between different villages because different economic development strategies are permitted. It is undoubted that we can find different kinds of politics in villages. So clientelism no longer can generalize the village politics in post-Mao China. Oi's finding only reflects the partial political reality in rural China that the local cadres still maintain their power as they continue to maintain the basis of patronage through rural industrialization and enterprization. The rural industries and enterprises become the new power source of the local cadres who control the contract of enterprises, bank credit, social welfare and so forth. My case reflects another type of village politics that the local cadres lost their status of patrons. Obviously, the economy structure of Ku Village is quite different from Nee and Oi's description of rural society. There is not any enterprise and industry in Ku Village, where farming is the predominant occupation. The economic and political power among the villagers is relatively equal. No new patron has emerged in the village. So the patron-client bonds have been totally broken down.



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From this research, I suggest adopting a broader view of power when we study the village politics. Most scholars such as Oi, Nee and so forth often reduce the power relationship to a narrow "material nexus". I think that power is not only defined as control over resources, and it cannot be satisfactorily understood in terms of formal structures of authority. Power is not simply something that is unquestioned possessed, accumulated and given. It emerges out of processes of social interaction. Someone's having power does not entail that others are without. The cadres in a village maintaining their authority does not mean that peasants cannot obtain their power. Simply speaking, authority is legally defined but power is socially defined. Power is the exercise of constraints and compulsion against the will of an individual and groups. The exercise of power is grounded in the challenge-response mechanism of class conflict. The zero-sum thinking of power is thus misplaced.

Additionally, I want to re-emphasize the essence of acto-orient approach in social research, which emphasizes to locating individuals in the specific life-worlds in which they manage their everyday affairs and recognize that individual and social groups are "knowledgable" and "capable". The actors devise ways of solving problematic situations and actively engage in constructing their own social world. My case seems to confirm the assumption of this approach that actors (peasants) in Ku Village are not



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powerless to influence policy making and implementation, but actively engage in the construction of their own social worlds and livelihood. They fight unjust intervention and policies of government with different kinds of strategies. Behind their resistance, the peasants have their moral concern and judgement.

Moreover, I suggest to bring the analysis into a specific local context; if not, the research will become too general, common sense, and unspecific. Different political and economic structures, and culture nexus may create the chemical causation. Different cases may have different conjunctural causality in the village politics. So it is undoubted that my case is so contradictory to Oi's finding. I think we must recognize the multiple realities and diverse social practices of various actors. The most important thing for us is to explain why the diversity and variation between different places.

Finally, I want to point out the limitation of current Chinese studies. Most scholars of village politics collect their data mainly through interviews with the officials at the county, township, and village levels and so forth. The biggest problem is that this data collection method will hide the role and voice of underclass, subordinate groups and peasantry. The "power" is also possessed and regarded as top to down exertion. In this analysis, the underclass or peasantry become powerless. So I suggest bringing the peasants into the political analysis and taking their



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everyday practice seriously. For this purpose, we have to stay at the field for a relatively longer period as a participant observer. If not, we will miss the important aspect of the village politics -- power of the powerless.



## Appendix A. List of Interviewees

1. A Ling - female, about 35 years old, women representative in Xiaohuang
2. Baba - villager, female, about 60 year old
3. Brother Ming - about 40 years old, former vice-party secretary of brigade of Xiaohuang
4. Brother Li - villager, about 25 years old, now works in the factory of Shenzhen
5. Brother Xin - villager, about 21 years old
6. Brother San - villager, about 20 years old
7. Chongshen - about 50 years old, present accountant of Xiaohuang
8. Chunsheng - female, about 50 years old, the party secretary of Xiaohuang production brigade and administrative district
9. Granduncle WenDe - villager, about 75 years old
10. Huangmao - male, villager, about 25 years old, works in factory of Dongguan
11. Liqing - Brother Ming's wife, former villager, present cadres in Mei county
12. Secretary Li - about 65 years old, former vice-chairman of Agriculture Committee of Mei County
13. Sister Ling - villager, about 30 years old
14. Uncle Bi - about 70 years old, former brigade leader
16. Uncle Chang - villager, about 50 years old
17. Uncle Chang's wife - villager, about 45 years old
18. Uncle Bing - villager, about 60 years old, now lives in Songkou town
19. Uncle Jiang - villager, about 50 years old
20. Uncle Leng - about 55 year old, village head
21. Uncle Nianhua - about 55 years old, former brigade leader in Xiaohuang
22. Uncle Qiang - villager about 55 years old
23. Uncle Si - villager, about 70 years old
24. Uncle Wu - villager, about 65 years old
25. Uncle Xiang - about 50 years old, principal of Songxi primary school in Ku Village



## Appendix B. Glossary

- baochan dao zu, lianchan jichou 包產到組, 聯產計酬, production contracted to groups, compensation linked to output  
baochan daohu 包產到戶, production contracted to households  
baogan daohu 包幹到戶, tasks contracted to household
- chaosheng tousheng youjidui 超生偷生游擊隊, unplanned birth guerrilla force  
chi guojia fan 吃國家飯, ate state rice  
chi jiti fan 吃集體飯, ate collective rice  
chongyang 重陽, festival of Chinese  
cun 村, village  
cunweihui 村委會, villager's committee  
cunxiao zu 村小組, village small groups
- da di zu 大地主, big landlord  
da hu 大戶, big planting household  
dang 黨, the party  
dabao gan 大包幹, big contracting of production  
dangzhi bu 黨支部, party branch committee  
dingchan 定產, unified production quota  
difang ganbu 地方幹部, local cadres  
dui lian 丟臉, losing face
- fenshui xian 分數線, score line  
fengshui 風水, geomantic omen  
fentian daohu 分田到戶, divide the land to the households
- gaochao 高潮, high tides  
gaohao guanxi 搞好關係, keep good relationship  
gaojia shu 高價書, high price education  
ge ziben zhuyi weiba 割資本主義尾巴, cut the tail of capitalism  
gong 公, public  
gongfen 工分, work points  
gongan ju 公安局, Public Security Bureaus  
guanli qu 管理區, administrative region or administrative district  
guanxi 關係, personal networks  
guanyin temple 觀音廟, temple of Chinese God  
gui zhuyi 鬼主意, wicked idea  
guojia 國家, the state  
guojia ganbu 國家幹部, state cadres  
Guomingdang 國民黨, National Party



han di 旱地, dry land

Hang jiang 韓江, the main river in Guangdong

haohan buchi yanqian kui 好漢不吃眼前虧, true man don't immediately get the

hei wulei 黑五類, black five categories

huayan qiaoyu 花言巧語, sweet words

worst of it

jiao 角, unit of money

jiaoyu liang 教育糧, education grain

jiangxin bixin 將心比心, taking the mind of the others

jiu shehui 舊社會, old society

jinguang dadao 金光大道, golden road

jiben kouliang 基本口糧, minimum amount of grain as a basic ration

Jinshi 進士, successful candidate in the highest imperial examination

jingji guanli weiyuanhui 經濟管理委員會, economic management committee

kaihuang zhongguo 開荒種果, opening out the wasteland and planting fruit tree

kunnan hu 困難戶, economically distressed household

lianchan daohu 聯產到戶 linking output to the household

mu 畝, unit of area

nongmang 農忙 busy season

nongmin bobo 農民伯伯, Uncle Peasants

nongxian 農閒, slack season

qunzhong pidou dahui 群眾批鬥大會, mass struggle meeting

pinkun shanqu 貧困山區, poor mountain region

renzhi changqing 人之常情, the way of the world

shui tian 水田, wet field

shehui zhuyi wenming jianshi 社會主義文明建設, construction of socialist civilization

si 私, private

toupo xueliu 頭破血流, head broken and bleeding

tongxiao tonggou 統銷統購, unified purchase quota, unified sale quota

tongyi jingying, lianchan jichou 專業經營, 聯產計酬, unified management, output linked to labour



tiaopii fenzhi 調皮份子, mischievous element  
tuhuangdi 土皇帝, local emperors

wanyuan hu 萬元戶, ten thousands income households  
wenhua shuiping 教育水平, standard of education  
wubao liang 五保糧, five guarantee grain

xian 縣, county  
xiaonong yishi 小農意識, mentality of petty peasants  
xiang or zhen 鄉鎮, township

yamen 衙門, office of local government  
yaozhifu zhongguoshu 要致富, 種果樹, want to become rich, plant the fruit tree  
present happiness  
yiliang weigan 以糧為剛, agrarian must be taken as the key link in agriculture  
yiku sitian 憶苦思甜, recalling past suffering and think over the source of  
youdai liang 優待糧, favouring treatment grain  
youbi 有病, sick  
yuan 元, unit of money  
yuanxiao 元宵, festival of Chinese

zhengming 證明, certificate  
zhengfu 政府, the government  
zhongqiu 中秋, festival of Chinese  
zhong yuan 中原, inland of China  
zhuanye chengbao, lianchan jichou 專業承包, 聯產計酬, specialized contract,  
compensation linked to output  
ziliu di 自留地, private plot  
zili gengsheng 自力更生, self-reliance  
zijia fei 自家肥, home fertilizer  
zou huitou lu 走回頭路, taking the road back to old society



## Appendix C. Note on Measures

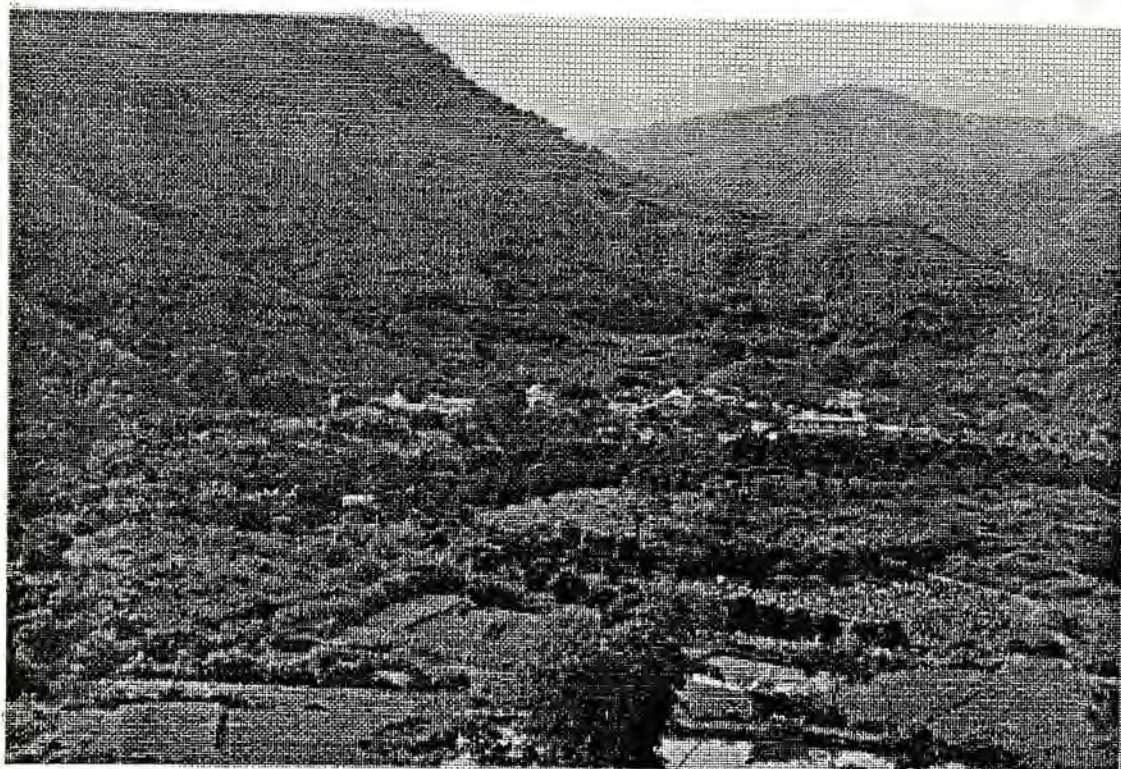
1 *mu* = 1/15 hectares = 1/6 acre  
1 *jin* = 0.5 kilogram = 1.1 pounds  
100 *jin* = 1 *dan*  
10 *fen* = 1 *mao*  
10 *mao* = 1 *yuan*

All transliteration of Chinese terms is in the *pinyin* system of organization of Mandarin.

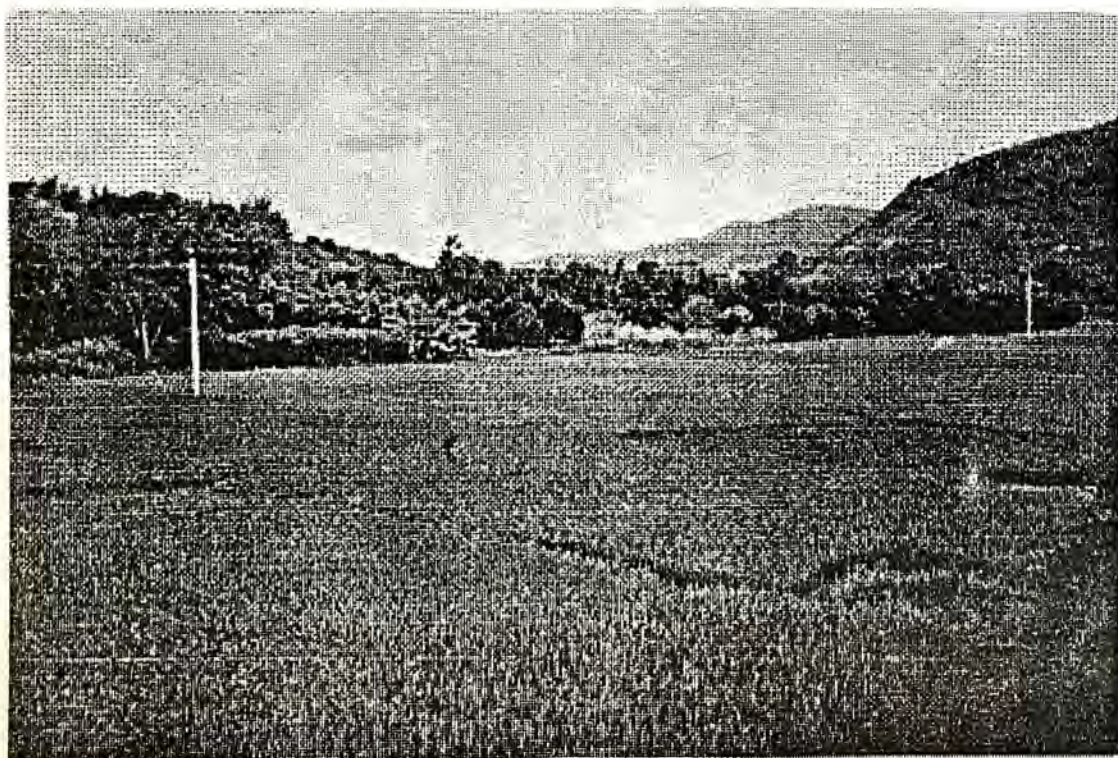




1. Ku Village



2. Shaddock trees  
are scattered all  
over Ku Village



3. The remaining  
rice fields

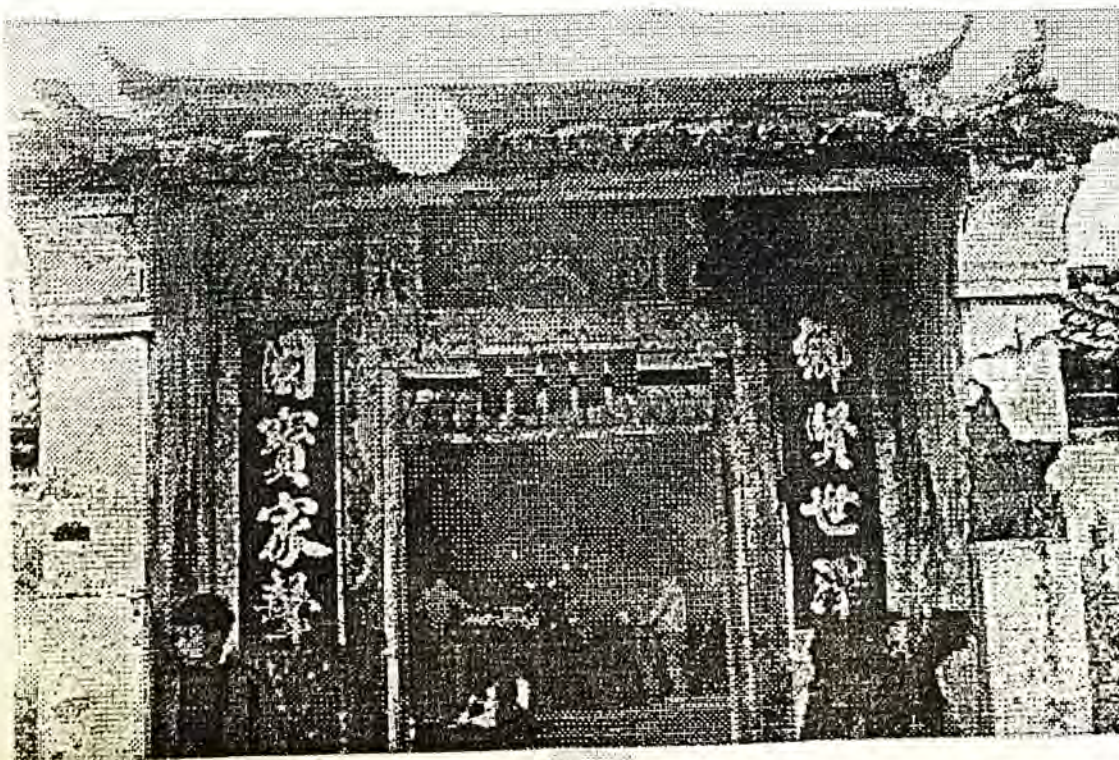




4. The shingles of local administrative organisations are hung out on the door of the store

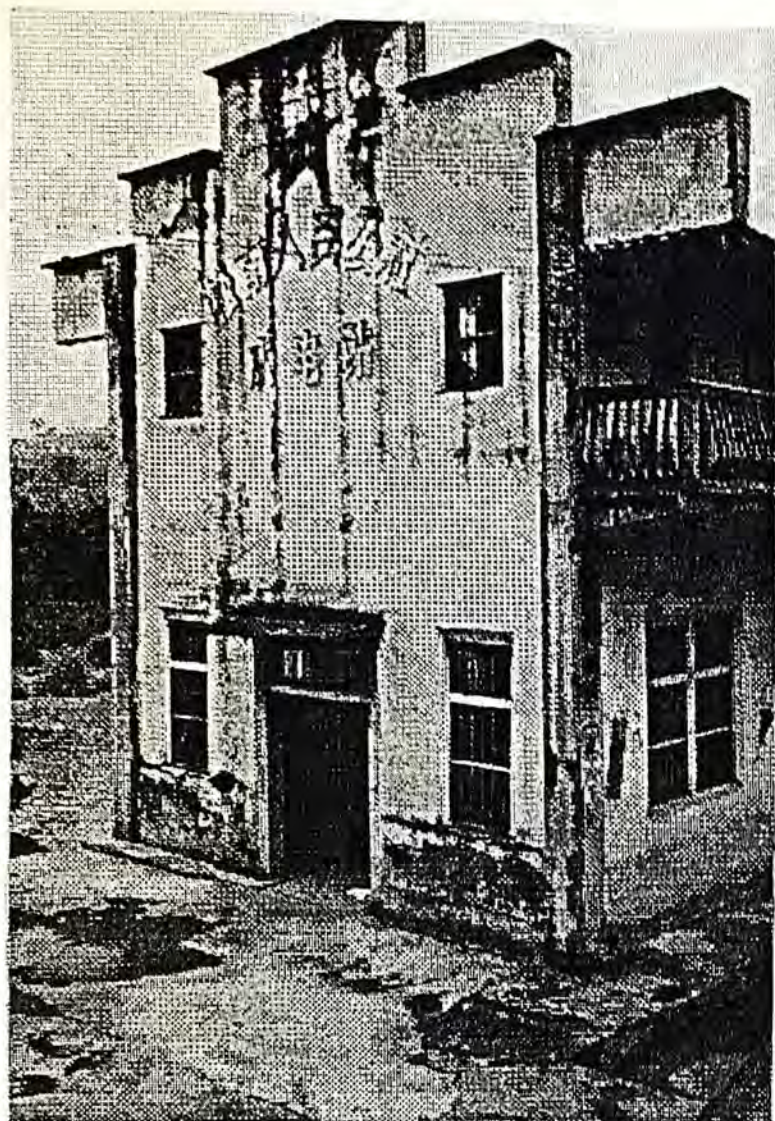


5. Songxi primary school in Ku Village



6. Ancestral hall in Ku Village

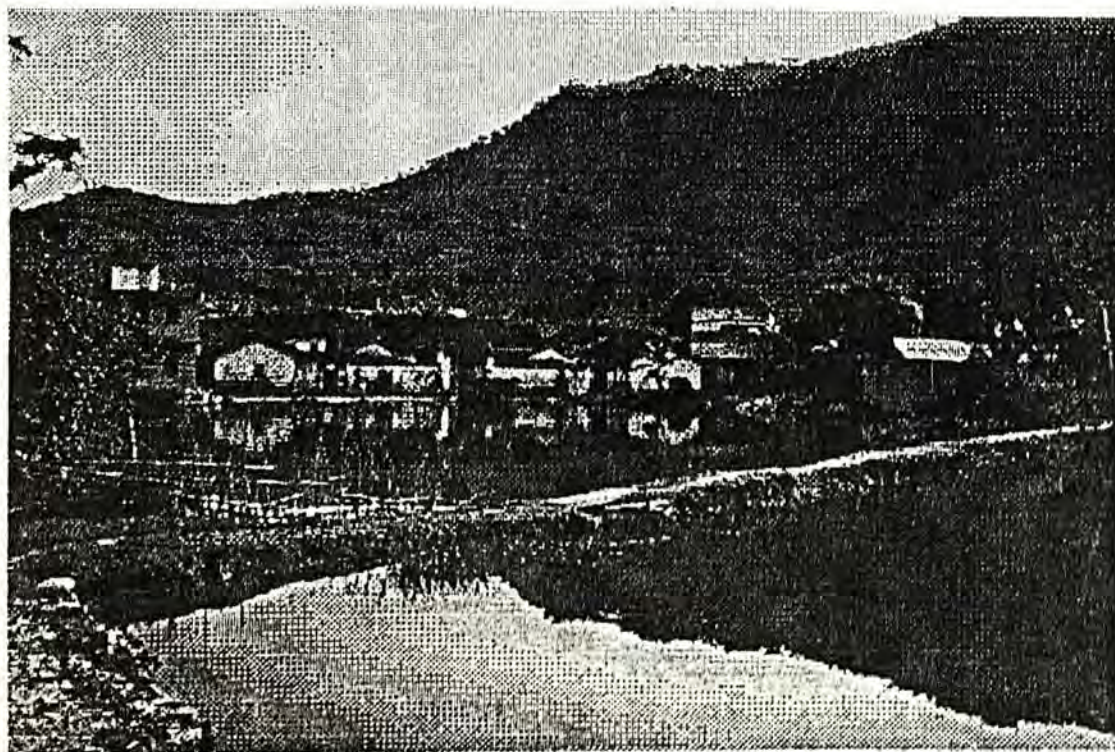




7. The hydroelectric power station was built in Commune era

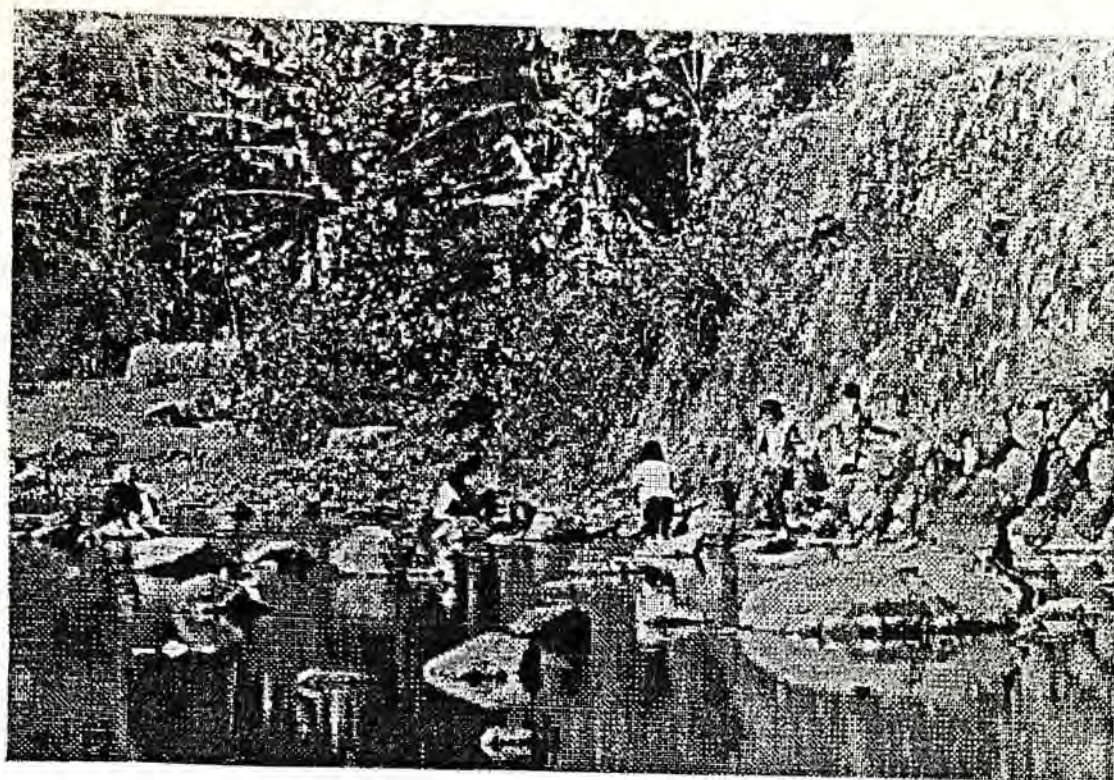


8. Peasants are working in the private plot



9. Fish ponds in Ku Village





10. Peasants'  
life I



11. Peasants'  
life II

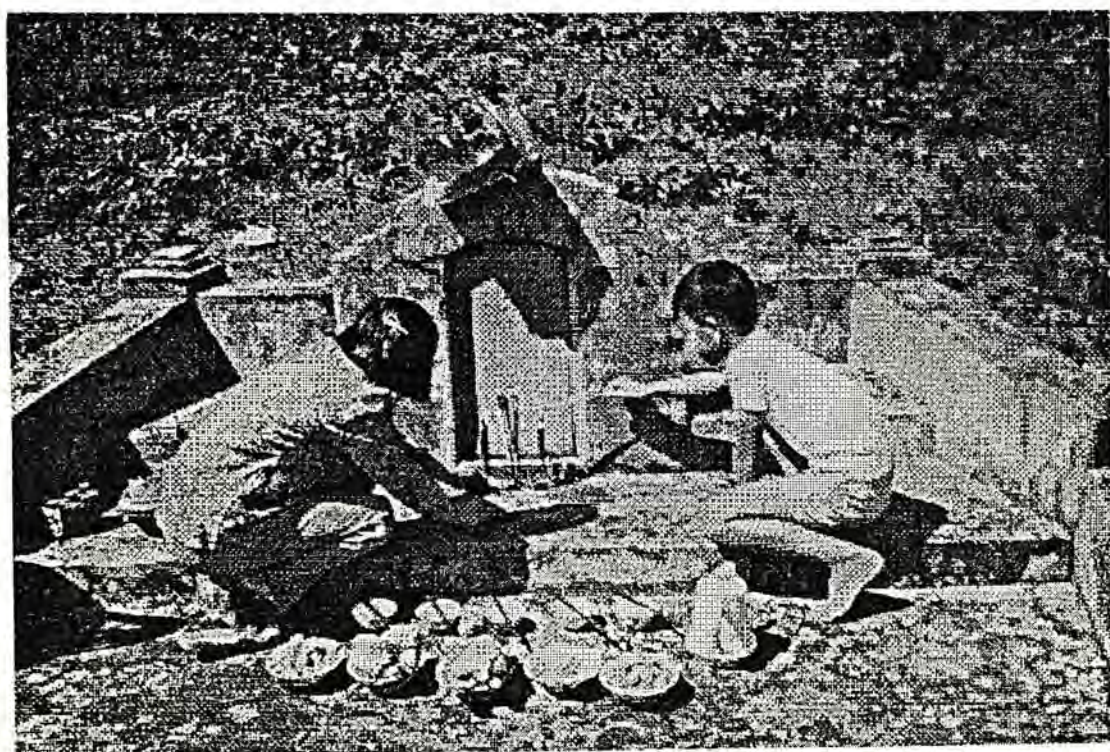


12. Peasants'  
life III





13. Worship in  
Chinese New Year



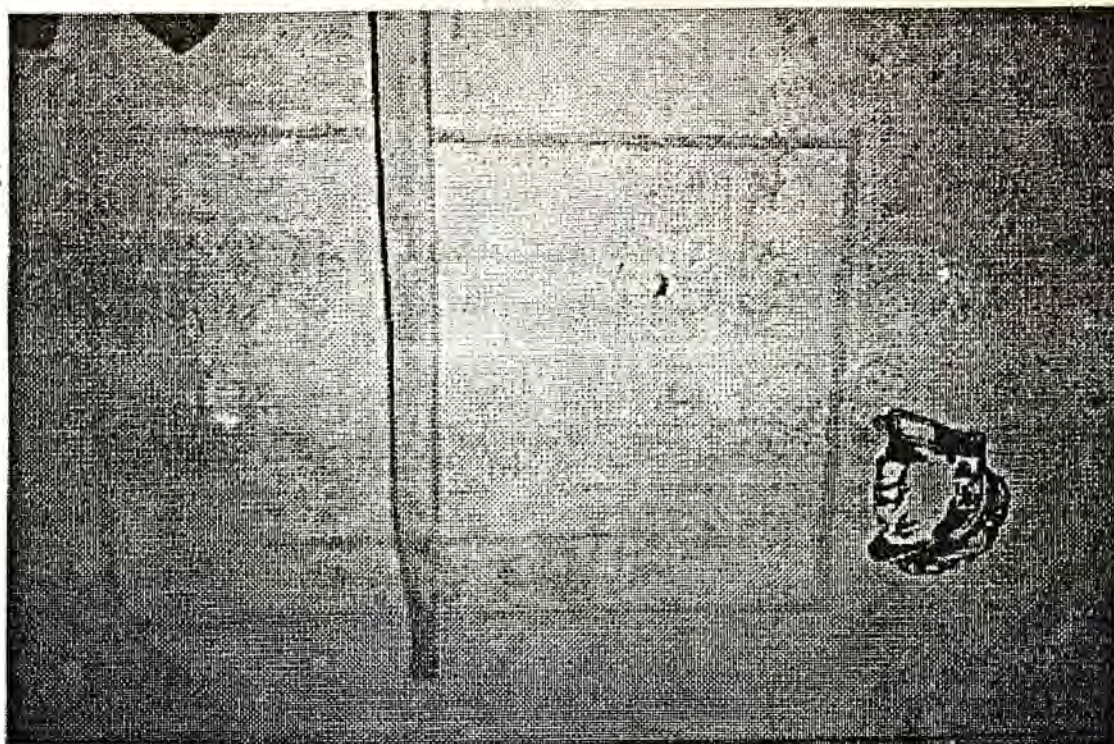
14. Offering  
sacrifices to  
ancestors



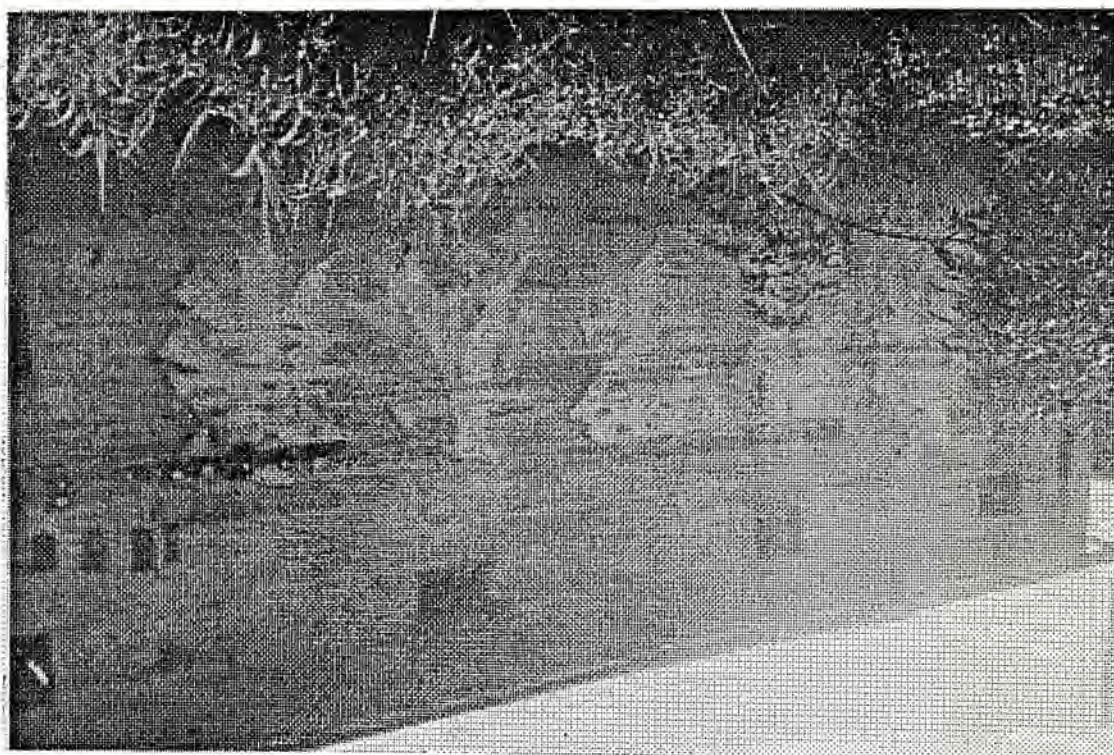
15. Worship in  
Guanyin temple



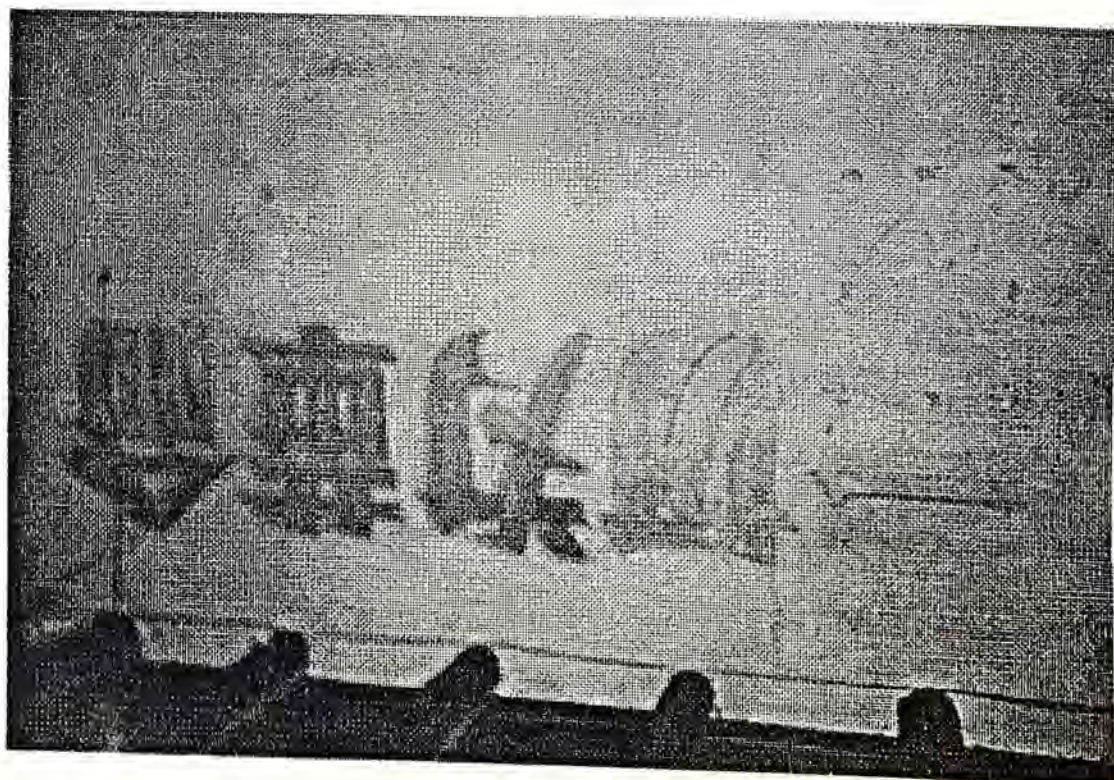
18. The remaining  
trace of Mao III



17. The remaining  
trace of Mao II



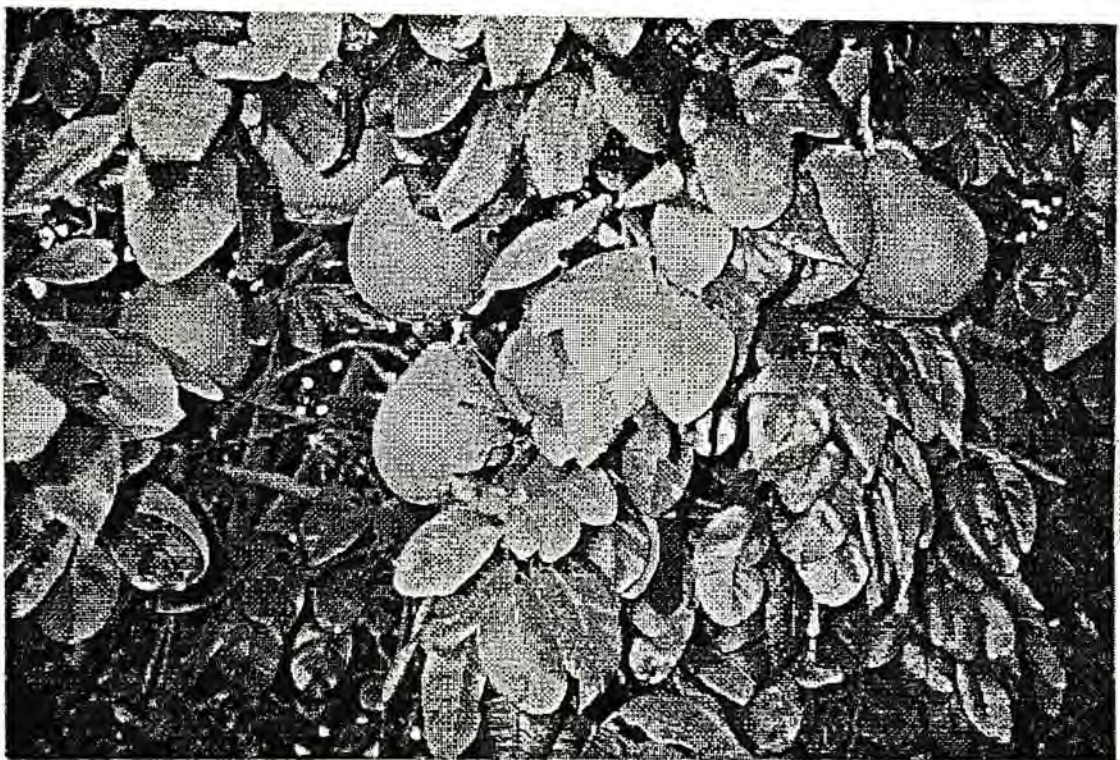
16. The remaining  
trace of Mao I



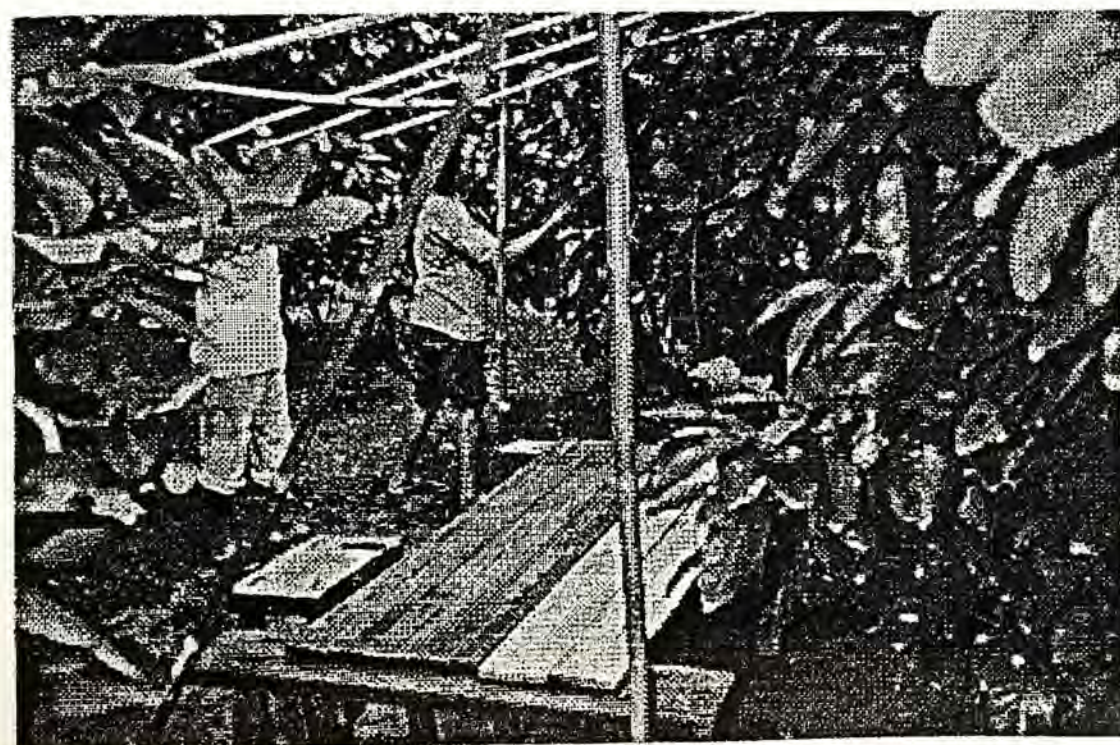




19. Peasants are selling shaddock in market

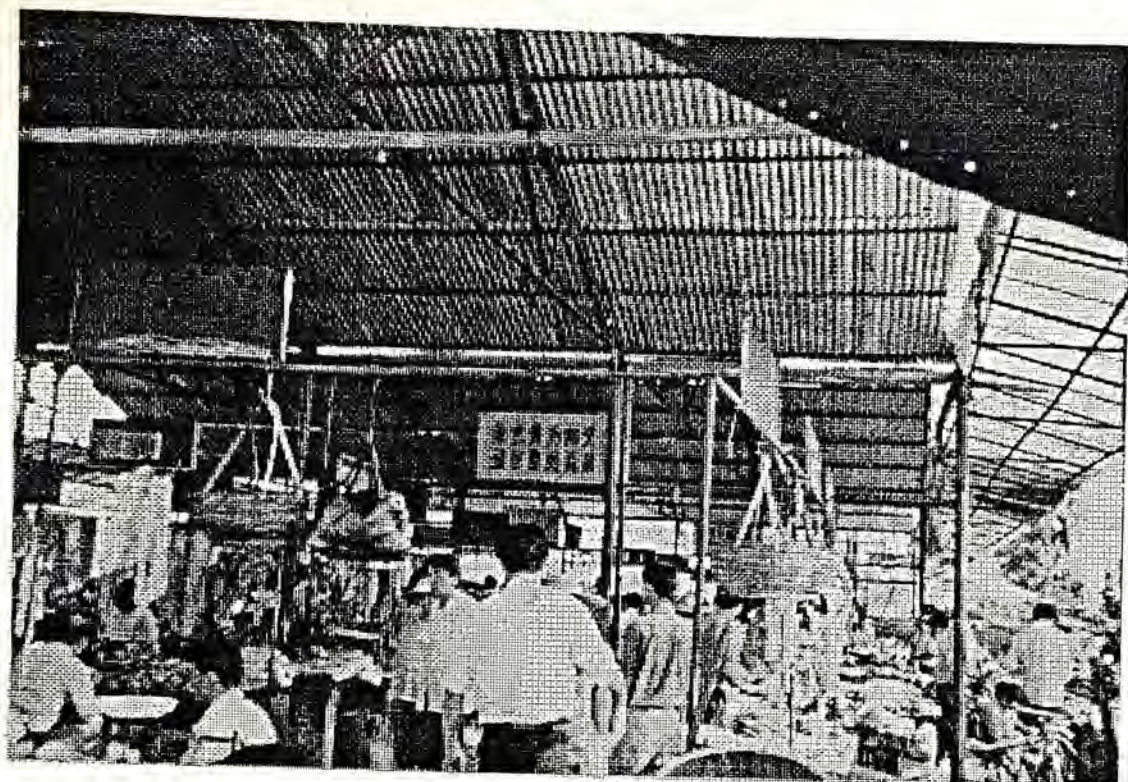


20. Shatian shaddock

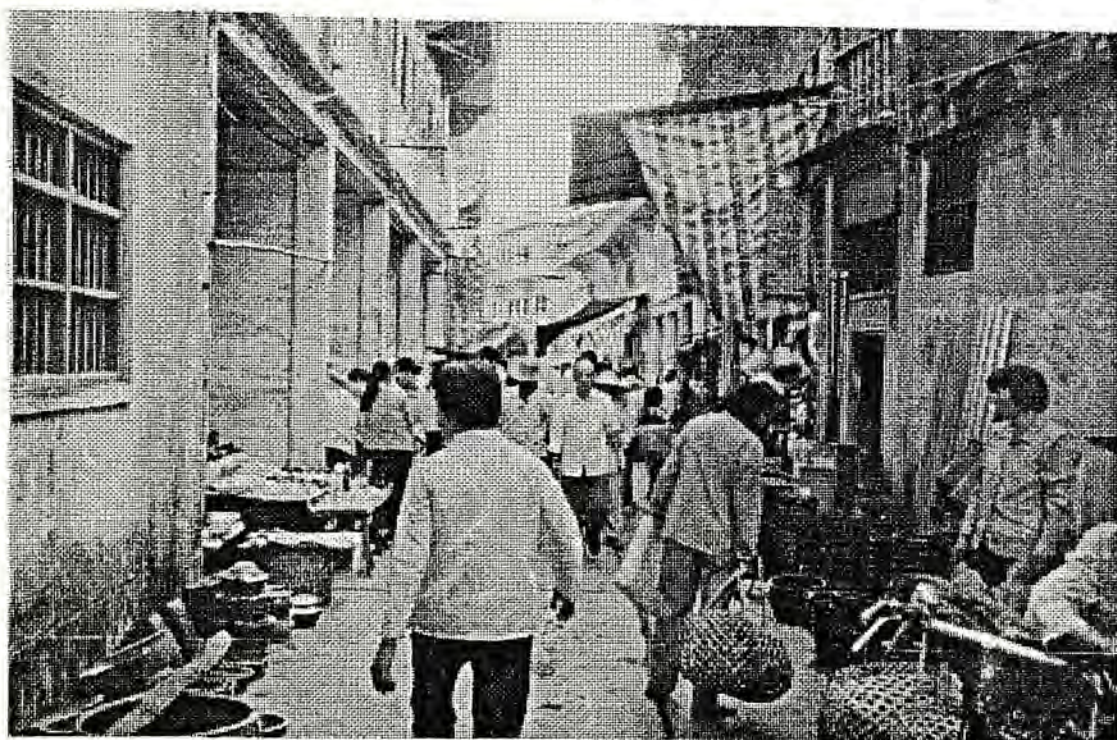


21. Peasants are working under the shaddock trees

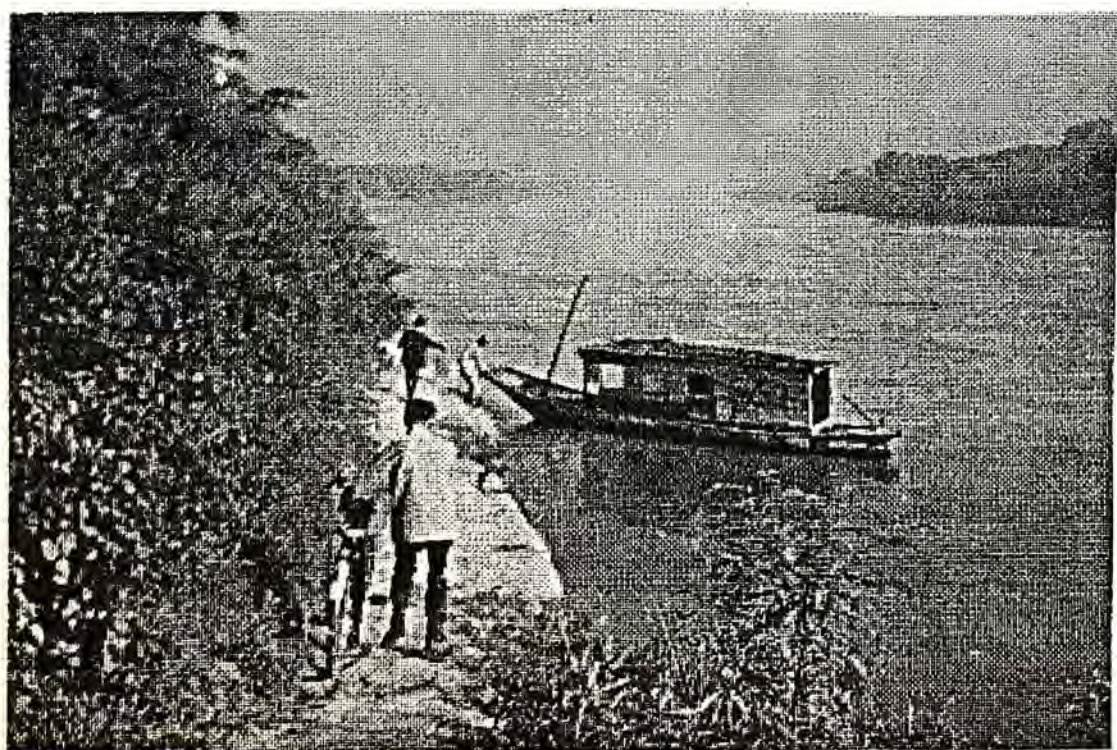




22. Market in  
Songkou town

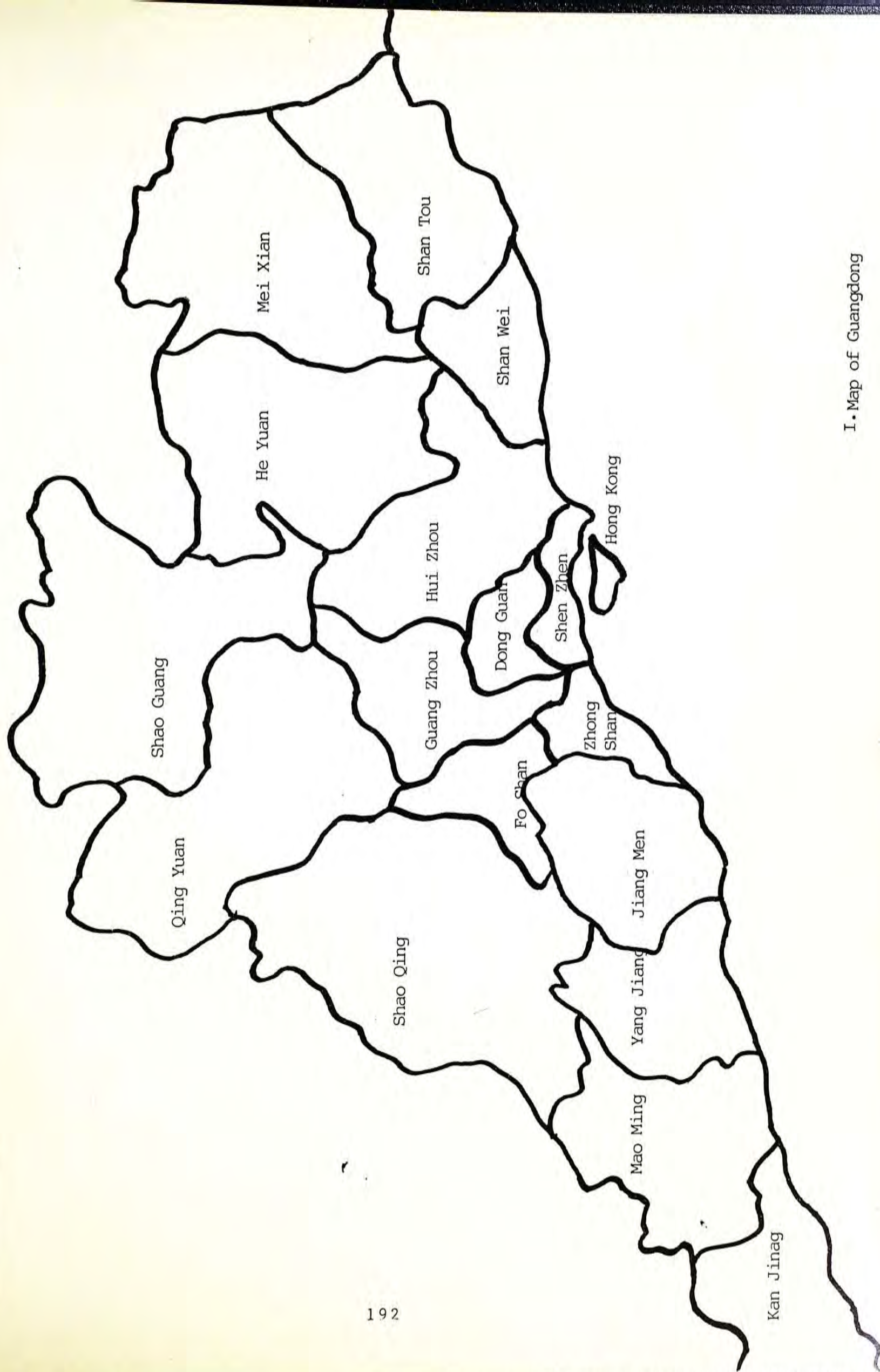


23. Fair in town



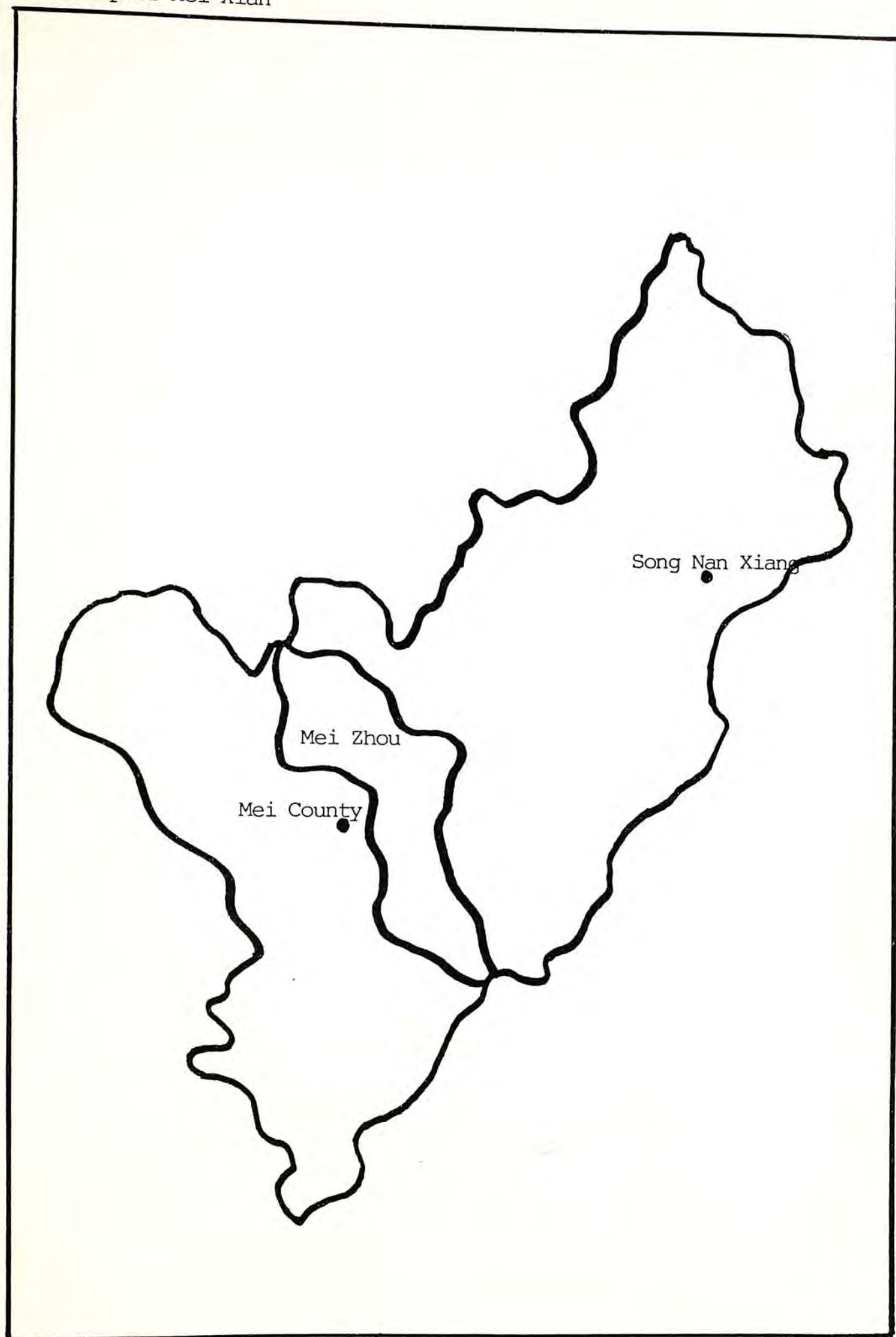
24. Villagers go  
to Mei County







II. Map of Mei Xian





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